RISTINA ROSSETTI
ET AND WOMAN

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CHRISTINA ROSSETTI, POET AND WOMAN

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

after a pencil-profile by her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti

STELLINGEN.

1. There is much resemblance between Boswell as we know him from his *Life of Johnson* and Pepys as he reveals himself in his *Diary*.

2. The lady-service which had come from the south of Europe, was a feature in the revivified and reshaped Celtic myths known as the Arthurian legends.

3. There is evidence that William Morris felt the spirit of the medieval sagas better than Tennyson.

4. The model states described by Morris in his *News from Nowhere* and by Bellamy in *Looking Backward* are entirely impracticable.

5. The name Pre-Raphaelite was not well-chosen.

6. Ruskin had no influence on the foundation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

7. In Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* Act I Scene I line 91 there is no objection to reading *scale* in the sense of *weigh*.

8. In John Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* Act III, line 1016 (Malone Society edition) it is better to read *accourted*, in the sense of *courted*, than *accosted*.

9. Afzonderlijke klassen voor meer begaafden zijn gewenscht.

10. Bij het onderwijs in de letterkunde op scholen is het beter een verzameling goed gekozen stukken van verschillende schrijvers te gebruiken, dan geheele werken van enkelen.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI, POET AND WOMAN

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

TER VERKRIJGING VAN DEN GRAAD VAN

DOCTOR IN DE LETTEREN EN WIJSBEGEERTE

AAN DE UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

OP GEZAG VAN DEN RECTOR-MAGNIFICUS
Dr P. ZEEMAN
HOOGLEERAAR IN DE FACULTEIT DER WIS- EN NATUURKUNDE

IN HET OPENBAAR TE VERDEDIGEN IN DE AULA DER UNIVERSITEIT

OP DINSDAG 13 MAART 1923,
DES NAMIDDAGS TE 4 UUR

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JUSTINE FREDRIKA DE WILDE
GEBOREN TE ZUTPHEN

NIJKERK — DRUKKERIJ C. C. CALLENBACH
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PREFACE.

I am glad to avail myself of the opportunity to express my deep gratitude to Dr. A. E. H. Swaen, Professor of English Philology in the University of Amsterdam, whose unfailing helpfulness and kind encouragement have smoothed my way, both during my former studies and while this little book was in preparation.

Amsterdam, March 1923.

INTRODUCTION.

Mr. George Saintsbury in his *Nineteenth Century Literature*, chapter VI, says: 'Miss Rossetti has no superior among Englishwomen who have the gift of literature'. Yet she is comparatively little known. Her melodious verse, which expresses the thoughts and feelings of an entirely pure mind, has but few readers.

The cause of this regrettable neglect must probably be sought partly in her possessing a brother who achieved great renown both as a painter and as a poet, and whose personal influence on those who came into contact with him was so great that he overshadowed his sister; partly in her living at the same time as Mrs. Browning, who was intellectually her superior and who, by writing upon topics of general interest, achieved a great immediate success, so that Christina's more purely artistic excellence was little noticed. Besides, a great part of Christina Rossetti's work, the strictly devotional part, appealed only to a special group of readers; add to this her humble, retiring nature and it need not astonish us too much that she should not have had wider recognition. Those however among literary men and lovers

of poetry who have expressed an opinion about her work, are unanimous in its praise.

In the succeeding chapters an attempt will be made to show that Christina Rossetti combined in her poetry great simplicity with great artistic finish, the former appearing in her use of homely, one-syllabic words expressing thoughts clear as crystal, the secret of the latter being her inborn artistic sense of rhythm and her ear for melody. She wrote so naturally that she seemed to disregard art. It will also be shown that her poetry was the sincere expression of her personality and that her hopes and fears, her weariness of this life and expectation of a better future, her melancholy, her joy and humour are to be found in her verse.

I.

PARENTAGE AND LIFE.

Christina Rossetti was born on December 1830 [1]). She was the youngest of four children. The ages of her sister and two brothers, Maria Francesca, born 1827, Gabriel Charles Dante, born 1828 and William Michael, born 25 September 1829 were not too different from her own to make close comradeship and the sharing of games and pleasures possible.

Her parents were Gabriele Rossetti, an Italian, and Frances Mary Lavinia Rossetti, née Polidori, who was of half Italian, half English origin.

Gabriele Rossetti was a gifted man. He was musical and had a good voice, could draw, wrote poetry and had a keen appreciation for the productions of art. He was well read and made the early Italian poets, and especially Dante, the object of his life-long studies. He was a native of Vasto, in the then kingdom of Naples, where he was a man of some importance; his influence in political matters was great. When he was thirty he

[1]) For particulars concerning birth and parentage I have relied on the Memoir prefaced by W. M. Rossetti to his edition of his sister Christina's Poetry.

acted, under King Joachim's government, as secretary to the department of fine arts. With the return of King Ferdinand of Bourbon to the throne of Naples he got into trouble through his agitation for a constitution which Ferdinand had first promised, but later denied to his people. An ode of Rossetti's, written at the time, contained some lines that greatly displeased the king, so that the poet was one of the thirteen agitators who were excluded from the general amnesty granted to revolutionaries. Rossetti was compelled to fly and with the assistance of Sir Graham Moore, the British admiral, he escaped to Malta where he lived for two years, teaching Latin and Italian.

Then, a longer stay becoming impossible for him — spies of the Bourbon government had begun to trouble him — he went to England where he established himself and earned his living by teaching Italian. In 1831 he was appointed Professor of Italian in King's College, London. By this time he had already been married for three years to Francesca M. L. Polidori.

The Polidoris were of Italian origin but Mrs. Rossetti's mother was an English woman of protestant family. From her were probably inherited the strict, somewhat Puritanic, religious ideas that Mrs. Rossetti inculcated upon her children, and also the sound common sense

that she tried in vain to teach them. She is reported to have said: "I always had a passion for intellect and my wish was that my husband should be distinguished for intellect and my children too. I have had my wish; and now I wish that there were a little less intellect in the family so as to allow for a little more common sense."

Mrs. Rossetti had been a governess in the family of Mr. Macgregor and had, after her marriage, entertained friendly relations with that family; Miss Georgina Mac Gregor became one of Christina's godmothers, the other being Lady Dudley Stuart, originally the Princess Christina Bonaparte, niece of the great Bonaparte; Mr. Rossetti knew almost the whole Bonaparte family.

The family continued to live in London, Charlotte Street, for many years, so that Christina, except for the occasional visits to her grandfather Polidori whose great favourite she was and who lived in the country, in Little Missenden Buckinghamshire, spent her childhood amidst town surroundings till she was nine. That this had its effect on her later development will be shown hereafter.

She never attended any school; together with her sister Mary she received all her tuition from her mother. The boys got their early instruction from their mother too, but later went to school. The children received their biblical teaching from the same source.

Though Mrs. Rossetti was a woman of culture it was no doubt owing to this one sided training that Christina's knowledge was rather limited and that she had later to try and make up for what was wanting by reading. Unfortunately she was never a very assiduous reader.

Her health was fairly good till her fifteenth year. Then she began to show symptons, of what was supposed to be phthisis and ever since, except for a brief spell of comparative health after her thirtieth year, she continued to be more or less of an invalid.

In 1853 when, owing to the failure of his eyesight, Mr. Rossetti could no longer work to support his family, Mrs. Rossetti started a day-school at Frome Selwood, to which place the family removed. Christina assisted her mother, but did not like teaching and was very glad when, in the following year, her brother William's increase of income enabled the family to return to London.

The most important events in Christina's not very eventful life were two love-affairs which both tended to sadden it and which had a strong influence upon her poetical work. The first of these belongs to the time when she was about eighteen years old. A young painter, James Collinson, who was a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, proposed marriage to her. He was a Roman Catholic when she became acquainted

with him and Christina who, under the influence of her mother, had become a member of the Tractarian party in the Church of England and felt hostile to Roman Catholicism, could not accept this offer. Then Collinson gave up his religion and joined the Church of England. He repeated his proposal and was accepted. But after a while he regretted the step he had taken and returned to Roman Catholicism. Consequently the engagement was finally broken off, but Christina's health and spirits had suffered considerably from these emotions, which becomes apparent in her works.

Later in her life it was again religious scruples that prevented her from following her natural inclination and marry Mr. Cayley, a man whom she loved to the end of her life.

In 1847 she first met Charles Bagot Cayley whom W. M. Rossetti in his Preface to *The Family Letters of C. G. Rossetti* [1]) describes as: "a scholar, author and linguist, translator of Dante's Divina Commedia." He was a pupil of her father's for Italian and in this way was introduced to the family. It was not till 1862 that she began to see much of him. She fell in love with him and from a letter written by Christina to her brother

[1]) The Family Letters of Christina Georgina Rossetti, edited by W. M. Rossetti, XI.

William in 1866 [1]) it appears that she had then, on grounds of religious faith — Mr. Cayley was a free-thinker — declined the offer of marriage made by him. She writes in a grateful and humble spirit: "Of course I am not *merely* the happier for what has occurred, but I gain much in knowing how much I am loved beyond my deserts. As to money, I might be selfish enough to wish that were the only bar, but you see from my point of view it is not. Now I am at least unselfish enough altogether to deprecate seeing C. B. C. continually (with nothing but mere feeling to offer) to his hamper and discomfort; but, if he likes to see me, God knows I like to see him, and any kindness you will show him will only be additional kindness loaded on me."

She continued to see Mr. Cayley and they always remained faithful friends. There are frequent references to him in her letters which prove her unaltered feelings towards him [2]). When he died in 1883 his sister wrote to Christina: "He has left you all his own works that are now at his Publishers', and a large writing-desk, in which is an envelope with a letter of yours to him and a ring. You were, I know, *the* friend he valued most." [3])

[1]) The Family Letters of Chr. G. R. p. 29.
[2]) Chr. R.'s Letters p.p. 34, 55, 56, 97, 122.
[3]) Ibid p. 139.

Undoubtedly the melancholy that marked Christina Rossetti must have been partly due to the unfavourable circumstances attending the introduction of love into her life.

In 1871 she fell dangerously ill of exophthalmic bronchocele which greatly weakened her and the effects of which disfigured her face for a long time; indeed some traces of it remained visible to the end of her life.

It was then that she began to withdraw from the world and accustom herself to the quiet, retired life that became one of almost complete seclusion when, in her last years, the terrible disease that was the cause of her death, began to sap her strength.

For many years she devoted herself to the care of her mother and of her aunts Polidori, who all lived to a high old age. When they had passed away it became apparent that Christina was suffering from cancer which had already made such progress that she had to secure the constant services of a nurse. She rarely went out except to the church she regularly attended, Christ Church Woburn Square, in which, after her death in 1894, a reredos painting was set up in remembrance of her, the design of which, Christ uttering the words of consecration of the eucharistic elements and the four Evan-

gelists as recorders of the event, was made by Sir Edward Burne Jones.

Christina Rossetti died in number 30 Torrington Square, in the middle of the town she felt so strongly attached to. She was once asked if she would not prefer to live in the country, but her answer was that to her it was more interesting to read in the souls of men than in the features of nature.

Only on two occasions did she leave England to travel abroad. It is remarkable that, when on one of these tours she visited Italy, she felt such a strong love for this country that it seemed to her like her mother country. She expressed these feelings in a poem bearing the title *En Route* and also in a letter to her friend Anne Gilchrist written in 1861 on her journey through Switserland and Italy, where she expresses herself as follows:

"I need not exert myself to tell you what Lucerne was like, or what the lovely majesty of Mount St. Gothard or what the Lake of Como with its nightingale accompaniment or what as much of Italy as we saw to our half-Italian hearts. The people is a noble people and its very cattle are of highborn aspect. I am glad of my Italian blood."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI AND HER MOTHER

after a tinted chalk drawing by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

II.

HOME INFLUENCES.

The little house in Charlotte Street, where the Rossettis lived, formed a world in itself. The family had very little intercourse with outsiders; formal calls or society life of any kind were out of the question. For one thing they were not rich enough to entertain, and for another, their tastes did not incline that way. Mr. Rossetti was always very busy teaching, doing literary work and receiving Italian visitors of all kinds, actors, political refugees, even brigands; as a freemason he did not feel justified in refusing hospitality to any one that announced himself by the masonic sign. In his *Letters and Memoir of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, William Rossetti gives many amusing descriptions of the Italian visitors that used to come to the house. They were generally received in the sittingroom, where the whole family was gathered round the table. Here they sat pouring out their feelings, chiefly on politics; and the children, accustomed to hear their father speak Italian to them every day, could understand most of the conversation. To please his guests Mr. Rossetti would, in his beautiful

voice, recite the poetry of Dante and other early Italian poets and also compositions of his own, while the mother used to play and sing to them.

In this way the children got to know a great many perfectly unconventional people who spoke on topics entirely outside the reach of ordinary English children. It was not astonishing that, when they met English children of their own age, they felt awkward and could not get on with them, so that they preferred to stay at home together. In this way they used to share all their games and pleasures and got to understand each other entirely. The strong ties, thus formed in childhood, remained firm all their lives. It would be difficult to find a more united and mutually loving family anywhere.

The children got used to hearing from their earliest childhood, beautiful poetry recited in the melodious Italian language, while their mother's lovely voice also stirred their artistic feelings. William Rossetti says that, as early as he can remember, the making of poetry seemed to come natural to them.

Seeing that Mr. Rossetti's time was so entirely taken up by other things, the task of educating the children almost completely devolved on Mrs. Rossetti. She took that task very seriously. Even on their walks in Regent Park, tells her son William, she used to draw the atten-

tion of her small children to the difference between the Ionic and Corinthean columns of the houses facing the park. The children were also often taken to the Zoological gardens, then just opened, where they got their first glimpses of the curious animals, such as wombats, armadillos, dormice and hedgehogs that greatly attracted them and which became the special favourites of Christina and Dante Gabriel in later life.

Mrs. Rossetti herself had been brought up very strictly, almost Puritanically, by her father, Mr. Polidori. She had a fine voice, but had not been allowed to cultivate it, because this would have been worldly vanity. Dancing was entirely out of the question of course and her dress had to be of the simplest. Though she had too much commonsense and love for her children to go to extremes, yet this austerity made itself felt in the way she educated them, and left its traces, especially on her daughters. The seriousness and strong sense of duty that characterised Christina was no doubt due to her mother's influence.

The mother often used to read aloud to the children and gave them plenty of good books to read. *The Arabian Nights*, Scott's Works, Shakespeare, whose Hamlet they especially liked because of the ghost, were among their favourites; to Byron they felt drawn more

particularly, because their uncle, Dr. John Polidori, had been his travelling companion. Christina was not such a great reader as her brothers and sister, but she took much delight in, to mention two of her favourites, Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes* and Monk Lewes's *Tales of Wonder.*

It might be imagined that the children, always hearing their father speak of and recite Dante, grew to like and admire this poet. This was not the case however; it seems that they heard too much of him to like him. If a modern colloquialism were permissible, it might be said that they were 'fed up with' him. Not till much later did Dante Gabriel and Christina take up Dante, and then Christina 'gloried in him' says her brother William.

Mrs. Rossetti gave evidence of much commonsense in the way she managed the religious side of her children's education. She put edifying, 'good' books in their way, but, if they preferred others, she did not force these books upon them. She taught them Biblical history, but did not give them too much Bible reading, so that they did not get bored, but on the contrary, greatly loved and reverenced their bible. In the poetry produced by the Rossettis later in life biblical influence is strongly apparent.

For a while the children were taught German by

Dr. Heiman, a friend of the family, who is frequently mentioned in the letters, and who gave them lessons in return for the Italian instruction he got from their father. Goethe's *Faust* was studied, but Christina did not take much interest in it. As has been mentioned above, Christina was not a great reader. There were not many subjects she cared to read about. "Of science and philosophy she knew nothing" says William Rossetti in his Memoir mentioned before, "and to history she had no marked inclination. Theology she studied very little indeed, except the Bible, of which her knowledge was truly minute and ready." He says further that she liked Scott and, in early youth, Dickens and Bulwer, but that Thackeray "may have appeared to her too worldly and knowing." Her dislike to anything that she considered 'improper' prevented her from enjoying the works of such writers as Rabelais and Boccaccio; "she never opened the pages of either" we are told in the Memoir. For the same reason the comic side of Shakespeare, the loud, rollicking fun which is embodied in a Falstaff and a Sir Toby Belch, did not attract her. Among very great authors Plato is reported to have appealed to her more than any other; his Dialogues she read with great delight. "Milton's *Paradise Lost* she disliked" says her brother, without mentioning her objections to

this great work. If, however, one considers Christina's High Church tendencies and her sensitive, refined artistic taste, the conjecture lies near that the rather harsh Puritanic tone of this poem and the somewhat matter-of-fact, earthly spirit in which the highest subjects are treated in some parts of it, offended her and prevented her from admiring it.

"As to Shelley" says Mr. Rossetti, "she can have known little beyond his lyrics; most of the long poems, as being 'impious' remained unscanned." Her admiration of some of Keats's works has already been referred to. Among modern poets we hear that she admired Tennyson and Mrs. Browning; Browning she honoured, but without eager sympathy; we are told that William Morris's poems were mostly unread by her and that of Swinburne she knew *Atalanta in Calydon* and some few other things. From her letters it appears that she was a great admirer of Turgenieff's works. [1])

We see from the above that in the choice of her books she was guided by the same scruples and restrictions that determined her conduct at important moments of her life when serious questions had to be decided upon.

A few more words remain to be said about Christina's childhood. The favourite pastimes of the children were

[1]) See Family Letters p. 188.

drawing and scribbling poems and prose stories. Dante Gabriel is reported to have made a drawing of his rocking-horse when he was four years old and Christina attempted to draw illustrations to her first poems. They all took the greatest interest in each other's work and encouraged each other. When a poem or a story was completed it was read out and admired or criticised. Christina's first preserved verses, written when she was twelve and entitled: *To my Mother, on the Anniversary of her Birth,* were privately printed, together with some other of her first attempts, by her Grandfather Polidori.

As regards her character Christina is reported to have always been a rather serious, thoughtful child, though not without some quiet fun, often at her own expense. She was shy and shrank from meeting strange people, a peculiarity that characterised her to the end of her life. When she was a child she had a tendency to be irritable, but this she conquered completely so that all who knew her in later life pronounced her to be a sweet-tempered woman.

Her religion was entirely a matter of feeling. She did not reason about her faith; she felt convinced that what she believed was the truth which had been revealed by God. Nor did she like to discuss other people's faith.

Her deep love for her father was not affected by his being a freethinker and in the course of her life she was on friendly terms with many people who were indifferent to religion. Her loving nature made intolerance impossible for her.

III.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI AND HER NEAREST RELATIONS AS REVEALED IN THE FAMILY LETTERS.

The more than half foreign parentage of the Rossettis and their exclusive upbringing account for the fact that they were, in some ways, different from other people. In the Family Letters there are certain features that strike us as un-English. There is first the great respect for the head of the family; after the father's death for Gabriel, later for the younger brother William. Then there is an amount of demonstrativeness in the expression of affection and the words of praise and appreciation they lavish on each other. English brothers and sisters would be more likely to hide any admiration they might feel for each other under chaff. Finally a certain formality which one cannot conceive English people to observe when writing to their nearest relations.

In Christina's letters there is a good deal of this formality. It is interesting to know that her manner of speaking too made an un-English impression; in her letters one may imagine to hear her speak. She is reported

to have enunciated every word very clearly like a foreigner who had spent many years in England. She rather prided herself on her prose style. In a letter to Gabriel (25 July 1879) she speaks of the "exclusive prose of her little book *Seek and Find.*" "I flatter myself," she says, "that some of it is that prose which I fancy our Italian half inclines us to indite."

In writing to her nearest relations she is always very polite and precise. However, this precision never degenerates into stiffness or priggishness; the frequent sparks of humour one finds in the letters, the great love and sweetness of nature that is expressed in them, keeps them very human. Christina's overgreat scrupulousness often caused her to apologise in her letters for what were, according to her brother William, mostly fancied shortcomings. She never tried to find an excuse for herself; she was afraid that there should be any untruthfulness between herself and her relations. "I am sure," writes William Rossetti, "that Christina never told a lie."

Her love seems to have extended itself practically to all who came into contact with her, but naturally her own people, especially her mother, had the greatest share of it.

The first of her letters published dates from 1843, when she was thirteen years old. It was written

in Italian and addressed to her father, who, as has been mentioned before, always spoke Italian to his children. They had feelings of loving reverence for him, but they lived in closer intimacy with their mother. To her mother Christina wrote very few letters, which is due to the fact that she practically always lived at home. In the one letter directed to her that occurs in this collection, we find great deference to her mother's wishes and anxiety about her welfare expressed; the playful tone characteristic of many of Christina's letters is already found here. "Mind you take due care of your wise self" she writes. [1])

Her mother is mentioned in practically all her letters to her brothers. In 1873, when Christina had not yet entirely recovered from the dangerous disease that darkened her life for some years, she writes: "Of course Mamma is in grief and anxiety; her tender heart receives all stabs from every side." In September 1874 we hear that "Mamma is her own dear, gentle, active self again." On 14 Dec. 1875, in a letter to Gabriel she writes: "Three of us will cherish and guard the Mamma adequately, wrap her up like a coachman and hand her a muff at the right moment." On another occasion she speaks of the "evergreen love of mamma" and again of

[1]) Family Letters p. 23.

the: "crowned Queen of dears, whose heart has many warm nooks and corners for children and grandchildren."

Gabriel's strong affection for his mother is referred to by Christina in a letter written to William after Gabriel's death, [1]) when she discusses William's *Preface* to the *Collective Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, which were edited by him. She says: "In recording Gabriel's steady, but undemonstrative affection for his family, don't you think it would be just to except Mamma from the undemon strativeness [2]). I am well aware (as I believe) that long periods of silence and non-appearance took place; yet on the whole I should say that beyond all possibility of dispute he petted and worshipped our Mother with exuberant fondness."

The strong ties of mutual love that united the brothers and sisters become apparent in the letters. A "love paramount reigns among us" Christina writes. The eldest sister Maria, who died in 1876 and whom Christina worshipped for her saintliness, is spoken of with great tenderness. "Mamma, Maria and I send warm loves", she writes to Gabriel in Sept. 1876 when Maria was very ill. "She is very good and patient and we need only regret

[1]) Family Letters p. 157.

[2]) In reading through Gabriel's letters, and in fact the letters of all the members of the Rossetti family one certainly does not get an impression of undemonstrativeness. The opposite is true.

her state for our own sakes, not for her". And later, when she informs Gabriel of Maria's death: "I think even in her confusion of thought that I once perceived her mind to be fixed on you and William."

Gabriel was not only loved, but also looked up to, not indeed for his saintliness, but, as has been mentioned above, as head of the family. He had an exceedingly great personal influence on all who came into contact with him, and, what is not self-evident, also on his nearest relations. Christina addresses him and speaks of him in her letters with the greatest deference, and also in his last years, when the abuse of chloral and stimulants had made sad havoc with his mental and bodily powers, she maintained her kind, loving tone. He on his side was always ready to give her help and advice, which were worth having, as he was not only a great artist, but also a practical man.

When Christina was about twenty she learned to paint and Gabriel took a great interest in her efforts. He writes in 1852: "I find that you have been perpetrating portraits of some kind. If you answer this note will you enclose a specimen as I should like to see some of your handwork. You must take care however not to rival the Sid (Miss Siddons, later his wife, who also painted), but keep within respectful limits."

Christina also takes an interest in all Gabriel's work and often refers to it in her letters. She writes to William in August 1875 [1]): "I recollect Venus Astarte, a noble drawing and one which, I hope, Gabriel may delight in painting; £2000 too, is, I suppose, a good price, even for his work." To Gabriel she writes on 1 October 1874: [2]) "There was a visible brightening up amongst us on receiving your good-natured proposal of a second day together. I hail the prospect of seeing again the Proserpine and, for the first time, the Veronica; where in England and its studios is your peer?" And again to William on 15 March 1878: [3]) "Gabriel was here last night . . . . he spoke with friendly concern about Ruskin" (whose mental faculties were in a bad condition at the time). "He looked at your Poets" (a volume of William's *Lives of Famous Poets*) "with interest and mentioned having received your Shelley. He is getting on with his Fiametta picture."

Gabriel used to send the manuscript of any poem he had written first to his mother, to hear her opinion, before it was published. In May 1880 Christina writes, "Mamma greatly admires your beautiful ballad *The White*

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[1]) Family Letters p. 49.

[2]) Ibid p. 47.

[3]) Ibid p. 73.

Ship; she looked up the story in Hume and found most of the facts, but not that of the mourning boy, which she would like her son to come and tell her about." Was it a wonder that Gabriel worshipped a mother who, even in her eightieth year, took such a keen and intelligent interest in his work? When sending her his *Sonnet on the Sonnet* he wants Christina to ask if perhaps a reference to death, at the close of this sonnet, may be painful to one so near her own death. Christina answers that he need not trouble about that: "Our dearest mother has so much to brighten and endear to her the approaching immortality, even beyond those hopes that we all have in common. Still", she adds with her quaint formality, "I most keenly appreciate the tenderness which makes you debate such a point at such a sacrifice." (The sacrifice would have been the changing of the end of the sonnet, which Gabriel offered to do).

In a letter to Olivia, William's daughter, Christina writes on 27 April 1880, "if, at some future day, the golden glory of art or poetry should alight on your head, you will find that almost, if not quite, the brightest point is that it kindles a light of pleasure in your own mother's eyes."

Gabriel repeatedly gave evidence of his interest in Christina's poetical work. On 12 March 1871 she

writes to him that she has rejected some, but adopted others of his suggested changes in her poem *Mirrors of Life and Death* that was sent 'under his auspices' to the Atheneum and published in the number of 17 March 1877. He advised her to shorten the title of *The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children* and told her he considered *The Lowest Room* 'too morbid and personal', an opinion she did not share, as she told him in a letter written on 14 December 1875. On the 22nd of the same month however she writes that she regrets having included *The Lowest Room* for, "you have scale-dipping weight with me."

Notwithstanding his artistic temperament Gabriel was a good businessman; he made a satisfactory arrangement for her with her publishers, Messrs Macmillan. She wrote on this occasion: "I certainly have too very brotherly brothers who command my affectionate gratitude by their unfailing care for my small concerns." Later again she speaks of Gabriel's "chronic goodnature."

Her feelings towards this brother find expression in what she writes concerning an article by Mrs. Meynell on the Rossettis, which had appeared in *The Pen* of July 1880. [1]) Mrs. Meynell had ranked her below her brother Gabriel and he was afraid she would take this

[1]) Family Letters, p. 87.

to heart. "Don't think me such a goose as to feel keenly mortified at being put below you, the head of our house in so many ways" she writes. — When Gabriel had died she was jealous of his reputation and scarcely forgave a certain lack of warmth apparent in Hall Caine's Memoir, *Recollections of D. G. Rossetti.* Concerning this she wrote to her sister-in-law Lucy: "We have been reading Mr. Caine's Memoir. Considering the circumstances under which his experiences occurred I think it may be fairly pronounced neither unkind nor unfriendly; but I hope some day to see the same and a wider field traversed by some friend of older standing and consequently of far warmer affection towards his hero who, whatever he was or was not, was lovable."

Mr. Bell Scott, an old friend of the Rossettis, had published his *Autobiographical Notes,* but Christina would not read them, because she had heard that he had written rather unpleasantly about Gabriel.

If more proofs were wanted to show the warm affection of all the members of the Rossetti family for each other and, in particular, of Christina for those who were nearest to her, many more of the letters might be quoted which she wrote to William and his wife and children. One of these may be mentioned. On 21

October 1879 she writes to tell William that her mother and herself have spent a morning with Gabriel. "I wish," she says, "you could have heard the tender and grateful warmth with which he mentioned your kindness in illness; 'like a woman', and the sweetness of your disposition."

Surely such great appreciation and warm affection between brothers and sisters is not a usual thing anywhere, and among the English of all nations, the expression of such feelings must be admitted to be most uncommon.

In Christina's letters [1]) there are references to many of the well-known men who were on friendly terms with the Rossettis; to Dr. Adolf Heiman who, as has been mentioned before, taught the Rossetti children German and who always remained an affectionate friend of the family; to Mr. Charles Bagot Cayley, also a pupil of Mr. Rossetti's, later professor Cayley, the translator of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, whose more intimate relation to Christina has been discussed in the first chapter of this book; to Mr. Ford Madox Brown who, though not a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, worked in accordance with the principles held by the artists belonging to that brotherhood and who, for some time,

[1]) Family Letters passim.

guided Gabriel's studies in painting: Mr. Brown and his family entertained the most friendly relations with the Rossettis with whom they became united by marriage-ties; to Burne Jones of whom Christina, on one occasion [1]) writes to Gabriel: "We are both very glad of the re-appearance of Burne Jones and hope that kindly face and genius may contribute something worth adding to your social circle"; to William Morris, whose wife and children she also came to know when Gabriel had jointly rented with them the Manor-house at Kelmscott, where Christina visited her brother. In a letter from her to Gabriel, dated 23 June 1874 she speaks of her 'fruitless apple-tree', referring to an attempted decorative design of hers, and says: "Mr. Morris has written me a truly obliging letter, finding something to praise, but setting up a standard of such complicated artistic perfection as, I fear, no alteration of mine can even by possibility attain". In some of her letters she refers to Ruskin whom, according to her brother William, she met probably only once, but of whose relations with Gabriel she was kept well informed. Swinburne, on the other-hand, she knew well. He wrote her several letters in which the liveliest admiration is expressed for her poetry; on the publication of his own collections of poems he

[1]) See Family Letters, p. 86.

frequently presented her with a copy. She entertained feelings of friendship and respect for Theodore Watts-Dunton, the author of *Aylwin*, who was Gabriel's most faithful friend and inmate of his home so that Christina often met him. She refers to him in the kindest terms. On 15 August 1877 she writes in a letter to William, containing an account of a visit to Gabriel, who was ill: "We left Mr. Watts with him and dinner on the table." She felt that Gabriel was safe in the charge of this friend who had great influence on him. Mr. Watts also took a friendly interest in Christina's private concerns. We hear on 14 Oct. 1877 that "that obliging Mr. Watts" has sent some of her poems to the *Atheneum*, and on 17 Dec. 1879: "Mr. Watts moreover makes me his debtor by such friendly goodwill" (he had assisted in arranging Christina's business relations with her publishers, Messrs Macmillan.) She writes to Gabriel on 9 Aug. 1881: "We think so good a friend as Mr. Watts may well receive even the honour of a Dedication from you, nor am I amazed that he set his heart upon it"; and on 19 Oct. 1881 she writes, with reference to Watts's *Atheneum* Review of Gabriel's poems: "I don't know that I ever saw anything so good of Mr. Watts's and I am happy to see him shine as a planet in conjunction with our family sun." Gabriel presented the manuscript

of a ballad, *The Dutchman's Pipe or Jan van Hunks* which Christina refers to as "a ballad of a grotesque-horrid type" [1]), and which he completed on his death-bed, to Mr. Watts-Dunton.

Of the names of other well-known men and women that are not referred to in her letters but whose acquaintance Christina made, [2]) may be mentioned: All the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Coventry Patmore the well-known poet who was in close relation with the Brotherhood, Robert Browning, Dr. Garnett, Jean Ingelow, Gosse, Mackenzie Bell, who became her biographer and Miss Ellen Proctor, who wrote a brief Memoir on Christina after the latter's death.

When we peruse the letters written by Christina Rossetti we are struck by the great humility that speaks from them and that was one of the author's most characteristic features. When she was engaged to Collinson she shrank from making the acquaintance of the ladies of his family. In a letter to William, dated 23 November 1848, she writes: "I am glad you like Miss Collinson, but have a notion that she must be dreadfully clever. Is either of these ladies *alarming*? not to you, of course, but would they be so to me?" Later,

[1]) Family Letters p. 109.

[2]) Vid. Memoir by W. M. Rossetti.

on 11 Sept. 1866, after Mr. Cayley had declared his feelings towards her, she writes to William "I feel loved beyond my deserts." When this brother had become engaged to Lucy Brown she said, in a letter addressed to her future sister-in-law: "I should like to be worthier in every way of becoming your sister." [1]) And when, at a later period, she had had a small difference of opinion with that sister-in-law (her brother writes: "I can safely say it was a trifle"), she takes all the blame on herself and apologizes for what she calls her "ebullition of temper, and for a hundred other faults". On another occasion she writes to Lucy: "I know myself deficient in warm, motherly love to children."

She blames herself for being 'haughty' and says that her illness has humbled her.

She knew herself to be a poet and a good critic of poetry and was ready to give her opinion on the work of others if it was asked, as indeed it frequently was by her brothers and other men of note, but yet she had no exalted opinion of her own capacities. In April 1870 she writes to Gabriel: "Here is a great discovery 'Women are not Men', and you must not expect me to possess a tithe of your capacities, though I humbly — or proudly — lay claim to family likeness." And in the same letter:

[1]) Family Letters.

"It is not in me, and therefore it will never come out of me, to turn to politics and philanthropy with Mrs. Browning; such many-sidedness I leave to a greater than I, and, having said my say, may well sit silent."

Mr. Ingram, the publisher, had proposed that Christina should write one of the memoirs for the *Eminent Women Series* of which he was Editor. She declined writing on A. A. Proctor because she did not consider herself the right person to do so; for a while she thought of undertaking the composition of a memoir on Mrs. Radcliffe [1]), but gave up this thought again. In March 1882 she wrote to her brother with characteristic humility: "I cannot see my way to setting to work, — may a worthier than I write."

Though Christina lived a secluded life, she was not without interest in social matters. Among the problems that interested her was vivisection, the cruelty of which she abhorred, and against which she asked her friends to sign a petition.

Her opinion was asked on women's suffrage by Mrs. Webster with whom she had, what she called "a courteous tilt in the strong-minded woman lists." She preferred not to give her assent to the granting of female suffrage, basing her refusal on the Bible. She adds

[1]) The author of the Mysteries of Udolpho.

though that, if female rights are sure to be overborne for lack of female voting, she feels inclined to 'shoot ahead of her instructresses' and to assert that 'female members of Parliament are only right and reasonable.' So with all her conservatism she is here more advanced than her contemporaries.

Her religious convictions rarely find expression in her letters to her brothers, which is not astonishing, seeing that neither of them shared these convictions. When writing to kindred souls, as, for instance, to Mr. Shields, the painter and designer, she does give utterance to these feelings [1]). Occasionally however, in letters to her brother William, the religious chord is struck. The despondency that is felt in some of these utterances was no doubt to a great extent due to her weak health. On 8 May 1888 [2]) she wrote: "Perhaps you do so already, — but if not, and if you would not think it wrong, I wish you would sometimes pray for me that I may not, after having, in a sense, preached to others, be myself a castaway." But in June of the same year a more hopeful tone is heard, when, after reporting a not very favourable opinion of her doctor concerning her health, she continues: "What then? 'the sweeter after this

[1]) Mackenzie Bell's Biography p. 98.

[2]) Family letters p. 165.

stripped earth, will be the shady rest of Paradise.' Not that I arrogate to myself so blessed an end; but God's mercy to sinners is infinite."

Though she was depressed at times it must not be concluded that she was a pessimist. On the whole the tone of her letters is cheerful. Even when referring to the sad effect that her terrible illness of 1870 and '71 had on her, she is still ready to make fun; she writes: [1]) "I am weak and less ornamental than society may justly demand." When there is illness in the family she remains hopeful; the letters she wrote when Lucy, her sister-in-law was in a bad state of health may prove this. That she did not feel attracted to pessimism in literature is evident from a letter she wrote to Lucy on 17 August 1892; [2]) in it some books are discussed, among others Turguenieff's works and she says: "I wonder if Helen [3]) has been reading some of my old Turguenieffs. *Le Roi Lear de la Steppe* I greatly admired; *Moue-moue* was consummate, but so fearfully painful. I hope dear Helen will not appraise life quite according to any such pessimistic standard, but will use her great gifts to better purpose."

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[1]) Family Letters p 35.

[2]) Ibid 188.

[3]) Lucy's daughter.

As one of Christina's most precious gifts must be mentioned a sense of humour that characterised her to the very end of her life. We often find sparks of it in her letters; she delighted especially in making playful remarks directed against herself. In a letter to Gabriel of 28 September 1874 she writes, concerning new servants that he had engaged: "I hope your change of servants will prove a success; I should regard with an eye of callous philosophy obesity and Hogarthianism, especially if not shared by the housemaid." In another letter to Gabriel (12 March 1877) she expresses herself pleased that a poem of hers will go to the *Atheneum* under his auspices, although she would have spared him the trouble by acting for herself, now that she is "old enough and tough enough." She evidently greatly delights in a caricature made by Gabriel as an illustration to a phrase in the *Times*, occurring in a critique on the *Goblin Market* volume: "Miss Rossetti can point to work which could not easily be mended." He had drawn an excited Christina smashing furniture with a hammer. She also chuckled over the following couplet on herself:

> "There's a female bard grim as a fakeer
> Who daily grows shakier and shakier."

which she quotes in a letter to William of 15 March 1878. Gabriel had paid her a visit. "I fear," she writes, "he was not in genuine good spirits, but at any rate he had a vestige of fun in him, witness the following couplet on *me* . . ." here follows the couplet, and she adds: "the point was to find a rhyme for shakier."

In a letter dated 16 July 1880 she tells Gabriel about Eastbourne and says: "The horrors of this place would certainly overwhelm you; its idlers, brass bands, nigger minstrels of British breed and other attractions; but I, more frivolous, am in a degree amused."

In 1881 (9 Aug.) again to Gabriel: "Indeed I am not 'sulking' beside the grave of twice-buried hope, because you have not read my book as yet."

On 10 February 1887 she wrote to William: "Perhaps my mirthful style has already suggested to you that your 'youngest sister looking dim and grim with dismal ways' is feeling better; indeed I am."

The above was a quotation from Christina's *Pageant;* October introduces November with these words and Christina playfully applied them to herself. She refers to the same lines when, declining an invitation she writes to William: "Your company would in itself be a lure and, if not precisely in dulness, I daresay I could beat you hollow in dismalness! Only would that game

repay us for our candle? Let us leave that Yarrow unvisited." (March 1887). On 18 February 1892 she reports herself as going on "if not friskily, doggedly."

Christina Rossetti's letters are written in careful, somewhat formal prose; they reveal the writer as a loving daughter, sister, aunt and friend, full of sympathy for other people's troubles and full of courage in her own; they show her to have been a personality with well established opinions of her own, gently but firmly expressed, with belief in herself as a poet and, last but not least, with humour, to help herself and others over the difficulties of life.

IV.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI AND HER BROTHER DANTE GABRIEL.

It may not be without interest to compare the two members of the Rossetti family who contributed most to English poetry, Christina and Dante Gabriel. They grew up in the same home, had many tastes and interests in common, yet differed so considerably in some essential points that a comparison may throw a light on the two personalities so as to bring them out more clearly.

At home Dante Gabriel was always expected to become a painter; he was encouraged in his drawing-attempts and when, as a young man, he for a while neglected the brush for the pen and declared that he preferred writing poetry to painting, his father upbraided him and desired him to return to what was considered his vocation. His relations were convinced that he was a genius, and it was but natural that he believed so too and soon learned to assert himself.

Of Christina we do not hear that she was considered to be out of the common except by her grandfather

Polidori; she could write poetry, but this was not an extraordinary gift in the Rossetti family. She was of a reserved retiring nature and did not put herself in the foreground; if she had not been a member of the unconventional Rossetti family she might have been merely an exemplary girl of the Victorian period, yielding the first place to her brothers and effacing herself as much as possible. In this case, however, it was Christina's own humble nature that caused her to stand back; she joined the rest of the family in sincere admiration for the wonderful gifts of her brother. Their natures formed a contrast: he was as eager and impulsive, as she was quiet and reserved.

What is astonishing is that, with all her gentleness and humility she managed, all through her life, to hold her own and, as far as her art was concerned, to keep independent in her judgment, and not to fall under the influence of Gabriel's domineering personality as so many other artists did. Among his contemporaries who strongly felt his influence were William Morris, Burne Jones, Swinburne, Meredith and Ruskin. Meredith is reported to have left Tudor house, where he lived for some time with Rossetti, because he felt that his independence of mind was endangered by close contact with Rossetti's strong personality, and Ruskin said that

he found it difficult to think his own thoughts while he was in the presence of Rossetti.

It was Gabriel's conviction that every artistic person ought to try and paint. He tried to persuade Christina to apply herself to painting. She made an attempt to do so, even took some lessons, but feeling that it was not in her line soon gave it up, though he urged her to continue. Under similar circumstances he succeeded in imposing his will on W. Morris. When we read the family letters we again and again hear of Gabriel suggesting changes in Christina's poetry and Christina ready to consider them, but by no means always ready to adopt them. On one occasion Gabriel wrote to Christina telling her that the *Ballad of Boding* was too much like *Sleep at Sea* for her to publish both these poems. Christina calmly replied "I hope the diversity is sufficient to justify the publication of the *Ballad of Boding*."

Both Dante Gabriel and Christina gave evidence of great family love; especially for their mother they had strong affection. The relation between Gabriel and his mother is the most beautiful imaginable between mother and son. [1]) With touching devotion he refers to her in his letters; any new poem or picture he has made is first

[1]) See also p. 20.

submitted to her judgment, before other eyes see it. [1]) With playful humour he enjoins her to take care of herself and instructs his sister how to ensure her comfort, for, he says, he cannot afford to lose her. After her husband's death his mother looked up to him as the head of the family and when his health broke down his mother and sister were with him and nursed him till the end came.

Yet in the important matter of religion he did not share his mother's convictions; here Christina stood nearer to her and could hold spiritual intercourse with her. Christina's relation with her mother was of a serene, almost saintly nature, Gabriel's was warmer and more human. One imagines that the mother's heart really felt more drawn to the son.

The religious teachings of Gabriel's youth bore fruit in some of his pictures as the 'Ancilla' (later called 'The Annunciation'), in the designs for churchwindows which he made for the Morris firm and also in some of his poems such as *Ave*. But these works were made in transitory moods; he felt drawn to religious subjects as he felt drawn to the supernatural and mysterious in general. He had not Christina's religious faith, but was a freethinker with mystic tendencies. Religious traditions

[1]) See p. 22.

attracted him, as the mysterious attracted him, for the artistic possibilities they contained, for the things of beauty he could make out of them. Material loveliness always meant very much to him, his models were always beautiful women, in his poetry he painted beauty. If Dante Gabriel's poetry may be said to be pictorial and passionate, Christina's may be called melodious and serene.

Gabriel was not a mystic in the proper sense, i. e. one who feels himself in close contact with the unseen Power. Nor was Christina a mystic in this sense; her religious poetry reveals her as not feeling one with God, but as struggling to reach Him. Occasionally, as in her beautiful: *After Communion*, nearness to the supreme Being is expressed:

> "Now Thou dost make me lean upon Thy breast,
> How will it be with me in time of love",

but in the majority of her religious poems there is the sadness of unfulfilled longing; as examples may be mentioned: *Lord grant me Grace to love Thee in my Pain* and: *Oh Lord I am ashamed to seek thy face.*

Even despondency, caused by fear of being an outcast in the end [1]), sometimes finds expression as in the 27th of her series of sonnets called *Later Life;*

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[1]) See p. 32.

"While I supine, with ears that cease to hear,
With eyes that glaze, with heart-pulse running down
(Alas! no saint rejoicing on her bed)
May miss the goal at last, may miss a crown".

In strong contrast with her brother, Christina was a devout member of the church; her frequent periods of ill-health probably fostered her austerity which increased as she grew older.

No self-denial or ascetic tendencies were apparent in her brother who, when his circumstances allowed him to do so, surrounded himself with treasures of art. His style which in some of his early pictures was of Gothic simplicity, for instance in 'the Ancilla', also soon grew more ornamental. Christina on the other hand schooled herself in self-repression, so as to become fit for the life hereafter on which she built her hopes. These hopes made her dwell again and again on the vanity of all earthly things, beauty included. 'Beauty is Vain' she sings. Her brother would never have agreed with her in this; Beauty remained his goddess to the end. His opinion of her sad poetry appears in his jocular definition of it as of one: "Seated by the grave of buried hope."

Though in her times of depression she greatly longed for the better life that was to come after death, her religion forbade her to put an end to her life. Her less well-

balanced brother, however, when enervated by his abuse of drugs, and fearing he might lose his eyesight, attempted to commit suicide. Where Christina had taught herself to refrain from reaching for earthly delights he, with too great eagerness, tried to get more enjoyment out of life than he could grasp, and thus exhausted his strength.

In outward appearance the difference between the two became curiously apparent. While Gabriel was artistically careless of his clothes, Christina dressed with demure neatness, making the impression of a nun. He lived the Bohemian life of an artist, keeping no regular hours; she led a well-regulated, rather monotonous existence.

A curious trait which the brother and sister had in common was their love of quaint animals, such as dormice, hedgehogs, wombats, moles, woodowls, lizards and mice. They accounted for their love of these uncommon pets by saying that dogs and cats were too human for their taste. Was it perhaps their peculiar sense of humour, of which this is not the only evidence, that had something to do with this? Gabriel delighted in what seemed to others rather eccentric fun; he would throw all kinds of unpleasant sounding epithets at the head of a cabman, roar with laughter at the man's anger and make it up to him by giving him a large tip.

Of Gabriel's irreverent wit Urech Daysh [1]) mentions an example; one day seeing two camels in the street he observed: "Look there's Ruskin and Wordsworth virtuously taking a walk". No doubt this was said at a time when he had already begun to chafe under the yoke of Ruskin's patronising kindness.

The delight Christina took in making fun at her own expense has already been illustrated in a preceding chapter, where also examples were quoted to show the jocular tone that characterised her letters. Christina's poem *My Dream* has an eccentric freakish quality such as is also found in Gabriel's delightful *A Match with the Moon* where the moon is compared with a wisp, a kite and a silly, silver fish.

There is much similarity in the attitude of the two poets towards nature. Having been born and bred in London they had rarely had an opportunity to live an out-of-door life; they were both town-birds. Besides, Gabriel for many years only went out at night and Christina was often confined to her room or bed, so that it was impossible for her to take walks in the country. To both of them the human soul was more important than nature. Hence we find in their poetry rather conventional and, in Christina's case, simple, almost child-

[1]) Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Inaugural dissertation, Kap. V.

like ways of referring to nature: 'the golden sunset', 'the blue sky', 'the red rose', 'the silver moon'. Instead of trying to understand nature's moods Gabriel frequently puts his own feelings into nature, so, for instance, in *Down Stream*:

"Between Holmscote and Hurstcote
The river's flecked with foam,
'Neath shuddering clouds that hang in shrouds
And lost winds wild for home:
With infant wailings at the breast,
With homeless steps astray,
With wanderings shuddering tow'rds one rest
On this year's first of May."

In *The Woodspurge* the poet speaks about himself only; the only thing he saw of the flower was that it "has a cup of three". In *The Honeysuckle* we only hear that he "found it sweet and fair."

The following fragment of Christina's *From House to Home* is interesting as illustrating what has been said above and also her interest in animals which are not particularly attractive to most people.

"My pleasance was an undulating green,
Stately with trees whose shadows slept below,
With glimpses of smooth garden — beds between
Like flame or sky or snow.

Swift squirrels on the pastures took their ease,
With leaping lambs safe from the unfeared knife;
And singing-birds rejoicing in those trees
Fulfilled their careless life.

Woodpigeons cooed there, stock-doves nestled there;
My trees were full of songs and flowers and fruit;
Their branches spread a city to the air
And mice lodged in their root.

My heath lay farther off, where lizards lived
In strange, metallic mail, just spied and gone;
Like darted lightnings here and there perceived
But nowhere dwelt upon.

Frogs and fat toads were there to hop and plod
And propagate in peace, an uncouth crew,
Where velvet-headed rushes rustling nod
And spill the morning dew.

All caterpillars throve beneath my rule
With snails and slugs in corners out of sight;
I never marred the curious sudden stool
That perfects in a night.

Safe in his excavated gallery
The burrowing mole groped on from year to year;
No harmless hedgehog curled because of me
His prickly back for fear."

Both Christina and her brother had a kind of natural dignity about them which set them apart from others; not only their bearing, but also their language, both when spoken and written, was somewhat formal and stately. They had much self-respect and Gabriel displayed a natural tendency to take the lead. His friends acknowledged his leadership. He was to them, like a high priest of beauty. His great energy made him the soul of the Pre-Raphaelite movement and it was also to a great extent due to his enthusiasm and activity that the firm of Morris and Co. came into existense. He did much designing for this firm and his judgment was highly appreciated.

Christina was not a leader; her natural disposition prevented her from being so. The natural dignity that made Gabriel the centre of a circle of worshipping friends, caused his sister to be lonely, with hardly a girl-friend.

She made the impression of being proud. Her reserve and shyness make it impossible for her to take any one into her confidence. In *Winter* she says:

"I tell my secret? No indeed not I"

and later, in the same poem:

"My secret's mine and I won't tell."

In *Memory* she confesses:

"I nursed it in my bosom while it lived,
I hid it in my heart when it was dead.
In joy I sat alone; even so I grieved
Alone and nothing said.
I shut the door to face the naked truth,
I stood alone — I faced the truth alone,
Stripped bare of self-regard or forms or ruth,
Till first and last were shown."

And again in *Autumn*:

"I dwell alone, I dwell alone, alone
Whilst full my river flows down to the sea
Gilded with flashing boats
That bring no friend to me.
O love-songs, gurgling from a hundred throats
O love-pangs, let me be."

In love Christina was also less fornunate than her brother. While he found his ideal of beauty in a woman whom he could worship with all his heart, she felt obliged to reject the love that was offered her and to live a life of self-denial. Beauty of the body meant very much to Rossetti; the ecstasy with which he wrote about it was misunderstood for sensuality and was one

of the causes that led to the much discussed attack of Buchanan on the 'Fleshly School of Art.'

To Christina spiritual beauty was far more important; she could not have been accused of fleshliness.

In their style both Christina and Gabriel Rossetti give evidence of the influence of their reading in their childhood and youth, which comprised the Bible, Shakespeare, medieval romances, Dante and other early Italian poets, Scott, Byron, Keats, Shelley and Poe. Urech-Daysh says: [1]) "Dass Christina Rossetti sich dem Einfluss ihres Bruders nicht entzog beweist ihr Stil." But it seems to me hard to prove that it was the influence of her brother that formed her style and that the similarity that is to be noticed between his way of writing and hers is not due rather to their joint education and to the common treasures of literature from which they both enriched themselves. Taking Christina's spontaneous way of writing into consideration the latter possibility seems to me the more probable one.

In the work produced by the Rossetti's three influences are clearly discernible. In the first place there is Italian influence, which is only natural considering their half Italian origin. Gabriel translated the *Vita Nuova* and other medieval Italian poems; Christina gives evidence

[1]) Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Inaugural dissertation, Kap: XVI.

of her knowledge of these poets in her *Tasso and Leonore* and in the quotations above the *Monna Innominata* sonnets. They both tried their hands at the composition of Italian poems.

The influence of the Bible appears so frequently that quotation seems superfluous; in Christina's devotional poems it is evident from first to last.

The third great influence that worked on them was that of Keats. *The Eve of St. Agnes* which inspired Christina to write one of her finest poems, beginning:

> "A garden in a garden: a green spot
> Where all is green: most fitting slumber-place
> For the strong man grown weary of a race
> Soon over."

became the cause of the first acquaintance between Gabriel Rosetti and Holman Hunt. In Hunt's picture 'St. Agnes Eve', Gabriel first found the realisation of his favourite idea that romantic subjects ought to be painted. He paid the painter a visit which laid the foundation for their life-long friendship.

In Keats the Rossettis loved the poet who greatly admired the romantic past and who paid attention in his poetry to the careful drawing of detail. Gabriel was delighted to read in Keats's letters an expression of the

poet's enthusiasm for early Italian artists who, in Keats's, and also in Rossetti's opinion, surpassed even Raphael himself. If one remembers that this was the chief idea underlying the foundation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood it is no wonder that Rossetti felt in Keats a kindred spirit.

Allan Edgar Poe was another writer who was eagerly read and much admired by the Rossettis. The spirit of melancholy, the mysteriousness and the romantic gloom that pervades Poe's writings was congenial to them. *The Raven* seems to have inspired Gabriel to write *The Blessed Damosel.* Urech Daysh quotes some more or less parallel passages from the two poets, a process which does not seem of great value to me. Parallels like:

the golden air	that golden air
the music of the rain	the rain that clamoured ever against the glass
the river murmuring	O water whispering
Fountains gushing music as they fell	water 's voice

and the personification of Time in

true daughter of old Time	She saw Time shake

may be collected from almost any two poets. Of far more importance it seems to me to note that the general

spirit of their work, their predilection for themes of gloom, horror and death was a thing they had in common. The cause underlying this gloom was probably partly physical and, in the case of Gabriel Rossetti and Poe, traceable to their addiction to the use of drugs and stimulants, in Christina's to her frequent illnesses.

For Christina the gloom was relieved by her hope of better things to come after this life. She alone of the three could say:

"Only, love, I long for heaven with you
Heart-pierced, through and through."
(Gone Before).

and: "Death is Life and Death alone."
(Night and Death).

and: "God looked down upon me from the heaven above
And I did not tremble, happy in His love."
(I have fought a good Fight).

also: "Soon must end the night and soon will dawn the day."
(The End of Time).

The title she gave to one of her devotional poems: *Death is swallowed up in Victory* expresses this hope, as does also the following fragment from her: *Earth and Heaven*:

"Yes, for aye in heaven doth dwell,
Glowing indestructible,

What here below finds taunted birth
In the corrupted sons of earth:
For, filling there and satisfying
Earth's fleeting joys and beauties from above,
In heaven is Love."

Only rarely does she give way to the hopeless melancholy and morbidity that we often find in Poe. In her *Two Thoughts of Death* we have an example of this morbidity: the decay of the body is dwelled on with unartistic precision.

Gabriel's way of production was less spontaneous than his sister's. He had to concentrate himself very strongly and therefore preferred to work at night. "With me sonnets mean insomnia" he is reported to have said and the composition of his longer poems left him completely exhausted. He was never satisfied with the first form his work had taken, but changed and remodelled and, in the case of his pictures, often painted them over.

Christina, on the other hand, worked with great ease; those who lived in the same house with her scarcely noticed that she was composing. She wrote down what came into her mind and hardly made any changes; she could work for hours at a stretch with no apparent mental effort or fatigue.

In connection with these two different methods of

working it is interesting to notice that we do not find in Christina's poetry the imagery, the sometimes a little far-fetched symbolising and the unusual word-formations that make Gabriel's writings often hard to understand. Her style is simple and clear. She had not so many ideas to express as her brother; her poetry was the interpretation of feelings rather than of ideas.

Like her brother Christina understood the art of writing sonnets. As regards the form of their sonnets it may be noted that, unlike Gabriel, Christina does not end hers in a rhyming couplet, and that they both introduce the peculiarity of repeating the rhymes of the quatrains in the tercets; so for instance in number 4 of the *Monna Innominata* where the rhyme scheme is a b a b b c c b d e a d a e and in number 8 of *Later Life* where it is a b b a a b b a c a b b c a. Gabriel's sonnet 26 has these rhymes: a b b a a c c a d e e d a a.

Like Gabriel, Christina practises great variety in the forms of her verse. The form of her *Goblin Market* is quite original. With great skill the poet here suits the words and the measure to the meaning; short lines interchange with longer lines according as the movements of the goblins or the experiences and feelings of the girls have to be expressed. The number of the lines of her stanzas varies, the accents of her lines are three

four or five; short lines interchange with long ones, and, unrhymed lines are often introduced. Like Gabriel's her rhymes are often very free, now and then too free one is inclined to say. In *Repining* 'by' is supposed to rhyme to 'steadily', 'harbinger' to 'stir', 'beat' to 'it', 'fell' to 'unspeakable', 'death' to 'followeth', 'alone' to 'gone', 'agony' to 'die'. In *A Royal Princess*, we find 'usual' as a rhyme to 'had a full', and in *The Prince's Progress* we come across ,receive' rhyming with 'live', 'outs and ins' rhymes to 'wince', 'air' to 'year', 'beneath' to 'death', 'path' to 'hath', 'together' to 'wither'. Elsewhere we find the rhymes: 'her-stir-steadier', 'leas on-season', 'death-shadoweth-lingereth'; 'ever-liver', 'river-never', 'raven-heaven', 'languisheth-death'.

As has been mentioned Christina does not practise word-formation so much as her brother to whose wing-winnowed, fire-fledged, wing-shouldered, vain-longing, hoarse-tongued, angel-greeted etc., which we find in his *House of Life*, there are no parallels in Christina's work. Nor does she use so many words of Latin origin, such as we find in the above-mentioned series of sonnets by Gabriel, e.g. multiform, circumfluence, commingled, primordial and confluence. Her style is altogether simpler and plainer.

Alliteration is more frequent in Gabriel's poetry than in Christina's. Examples are his: wind-warm, the whelming wave, soul-stilled, life-in-love. In Christina's *Goblin Market* we find: Fair eves that fly, Taste them and try, and in the *Maiden Song:* The three merry maidens: Megyan, May and Margaret.

Christina achieves her effects by sound rather than by word-forms. Carefully chosen and repeated vowel-sounds give to her poetry the melodiousness, the pure, clear ring that forms its greatest charm. In *A Dirge* of which the first stanza is quoted here, the i sound gives the clear tone to the poem.

"She was as sweet as violets in the Spring,
As fair as any rose in Summertime:
But frail are roses in their prime
And violets in their blossoming.
Even so was she:
And now she lies,
The earth upon her fast-closed eyes,
Dead in the darkness silently."

In *June* the sound of o in come is repeated:

"Come, cuckoo, come
Come again, swift swallow
Come and welcome, when you come
Summer's sure to follow."

In Gabriel's *Chimes* we have also an example of word-music, but on the whole his effects are more pictorial: he sees rather than hears what he writes. As an illustration may serve his:

"The ruffled silence spread
Like water that a pebble stirs." [1])

Both the poets apply repetition with great art. Examples are Gabriel's *Three Shadows;*

"I looked and saw your eyes
In the shadow of your hair,
As a traveller sees the stream
In the shadow of the wood; etc.

I looked and saw your heart
In the shadow of your eyes,
As a seeker sees the gold
In the shadow of the stream;" etc.

and Christina's: *Child's Talk in April*, second stanza:

"Then you should see the nest I'd built,
The wondrous nest for you and me;
The outside rough perhaps, but filled
With wool and down; and you should see
The cosy nest that it would be.

[1]) My Sister's Sleep, stanza 7, two last lines.

Christina's *Bird Song, Days of Vanity, Day Dreams* and *Margery* are examples of both repetition and word-music. Of *Bird Song* the first stanza is:

> "It's a year almost that I have not seen her:
> Oh last summer green things were greener,
> Brambles fewer, the blue sky bluer."

Gabriel generally places the repeated words either at the end of the stanza to form a refrain as in *Sister Helen*, or in immediate succession in another part of the stanza as in *Eden Bower;* Christina distributes the words and sounds so that they form a musical combination, or an echo. In *Passing and Glassing* 'pass' and 'glass' are repeated at the end of the first two lines of each stanza and the last word of the last line forms the echo:

> "All things that pass
> Are woman's looking-glass;

and the last line: Of summer joy that was."

As an example of skilful repetition of vowel sounds *Memento Mori* may be quoted:

> "Poor the pleasure
> Doled out by measure,
> Sweet though it be, while brief

As felling of the leaf;
Poor is pleasure
By weight and measure.

Sweet the sorrow;
Which ends to-morrow;
Sharp though it be and sore,
It ends for evermore:
Zest of sorrow,
What ends to-morrow."

Repetition is plentiful in: *Maiden Song, Golden Glories, Echo, A Bird's View, Cobwebs* and *Mirage.*

The childlike quality of Christina's art, finds its fullest expression in her *Sing-Song* poems. This childlike note is absent from Gabriel's poetry.

Contrast, often in connection with repetition, is used by both the poets, by Gabriel, for instance, in *A Death-Parting:*

"Your cheek and mine are cold in the rain,
But warm they'll be when we meet again."

and: "All still fall, and I still give ear,
And she is hence, and I am here."

By Christina in: *A Dumb Friend:*

"I planted a young tree when I was young
But now the tree is grown and I am old."

in: *Life and Death:*

"Life is not sweet, one day it will be sweet,
Life is not good, one day it will be good."

in: *Next of Kin:*

"The shadows gather round me
While you are in the sun
My day is almost ended,
But yours is just begun."

Comparison is also frequent as for instance in Christina's *Annie:*

"Annie is fairer than her kith
And kinder than her kin,
Her eyes are like the open heaven,
Holy and pure from sin;
Her head is like an ordered house
Good fancies, harbour in."

in her *Listening:*

"She listens like a cushat dove
That listens to its mate alone."

and in: *The last Look:*

"Her face was like an opening rose
So bright to look upon;
But now it is like fallen snow,
As cold, as dead, as wan."

Gabriel's comparisons are, as could be expected, more

ornamental and elaborate; he writes in his sonnet entitled *Love-Letter:*

"The lights throbbed . . . .
Like a high heart when a race is run and:
That soul wherewith her lips and eyes agree
Like married music in Love's answering air."

In his *Winter* a flake of snow is compared with a lily; a hungry red-breast with a rose.

To bring out the difference between Gabriel's style and his sister's, between his, one might almost say, carefully painted lines and her easy rippling verse, *Winter* may be compared with Christina's poem entitled *Summer.*

Winter begins with a picture:

"How large that thrush looks on the bare thorn-tree!"

The next three lines express a delightful fancy:

"A swarm of such, three little months ago,
Had hidden in the leaves and let none know
Save by the outburst of their minstrelsy."

Then follow two more pictures:

"A white flake here and there — a snow-lily
Of last night's frost — our naked flower-beds hold;
And for a rose-flower on the darkling mould
The hungry red-breast gleams. No bloom, no bee."

The sextet is both imaginative and pictorial:

"The current shudders to its ice-bound sedge;
Nipped in their bath, the stark reeds, one by one,
Flash each its clinging diamond in the sun,
'Neath winds which for this winter's sovereign pledge
Shall curb great king-masts to the ocean's edge,
And leave memorial forest-kings o'erthrown."

Entirely different in its simplicity is Christina's: *Summer* which follows here:

"Winter is cold-hearted,
Spring is yea and nay,
Autumn is a weathercock
Blown every way.
Summer days for me
When every leaf is on its tree;

When Robin's not a beggar,
And Jenny Wren's a bride,
And larks hang singing, singing, singing,
Over the wheat-fields wide,
And anchored lilies ride,
And the pendulum spider
Swings from side to side;

And blue-black beetles transact business,
And gnats fly in a host,
And furry caterpillars hasten
That no time be lost,
And moths grow fat and thrive,
And ladybirds arrive.

Before green apples blush,
Before green nuts embrown,
Why one day in the country
Is worth a month in town;
Is worth a day and a year
Of the dusty, musty, lag-last fashion
That days drone elsewhere."

The difference between the two poets is well illustrated by the above quoted poems. Christina's light, playful touch and her simplicity are absent from Gabriel's poetry. She excelled in ways different from her brother's.

V.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI AND THE PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD.

For many years Dante Gabriel Rossetti was the soul of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. At an early age it became apparent that Gabriel had a talent for drawing. In 1842, when he was fourteen years old, he expressed a desire to become a painter; like the other members of the family he had already tried his hand at writing both prose and poetry: it was a custom among the Rossettis to set each other bouts rimés, which gave them a great amount of readiness in composing poetry. Christina also liked to draw and so did William, but Gabriel was by far their superior in this art.

The boy was sent to Cary's drawing-academy in Bloomsbury Street where he stayed till 1846. In the last year of his stay he saw the paintings of Ford Madox Brown which he greatly admired. He wrote to Mr. Brown asking him if he might become his pupil. Brown consented and they soon became very friendly. What Rossetti chiefly admired in Ford Madox Brown's work was its independence from the methods of painting then

usual among artists. Brown had struck out his own way and had freed himself from convention. Rossetti, and with him several other young artists, were dissatisfied with the methods of painting prevalent at the time; the work produced by their contemporaries seemed meaningless and lifeless to them. They felt the want of ideas in the work of the painters of their day. They were of opinion that in painting thoughts and ideas might be expressed as well as in poetry, so that painting and poetry would become more closely united. Several of the members of the Brotherhood were both poets and painters.

As their own times did not prove capable of pleasing their imagination, they went to earlier times for their inspiration, especially to the middle ages. They chose their subjects from history and fiction. Ford Madox Brown, who, though not a Pre-Raphaelite, was entirely in sympathy with the movement (he has been called the grandfather of the Brotherhood) painted 'Chaucer reading his poetry before the court of Edward III'. Rossetti took subjects from Dante's works, both for his poetry and his pictures. Stories of knight-errantry were also considered good material; Rossetti, for instance, painted 'Tristram and Yseult drinking the Love-potion'.

Soon after Rossetti had become Brown's pupil he

made the acquaintance of Holman Hunt and, through Hunt, of Millais and Stephens. They were kindred souls and had very much the same ideas about the aim and future of art. They thought that to save art from the sad state of decay into which it had fallen, there ought to be a return to a more natural way of painting, to more simplicity and greater faithfulness to detail. They took as their examples the painters who worked before the Renaissance, because these painters were simple and sincere. They called themselves Pre-Raphaelites, not because they did not admire Raphael, but because they found their examples among the painters who lived before Raphael.

It is characteristic of the Pre-Raphaelite painters that they endeavoured to produce rich, deep colours.

In the autumn of 1849 Gabriel Rossetti and Holman Hunt visited Bruges. In a letter to James Collinson [1]), a Pre-Raphaelite Brother who has been mentioned in the preceding chapter, Rossetti writes enthusiastically about the pictures of Memling and Van Eyck which they saw there. He says of Memling's triptych in the Hospital of St. John: "I shall not attempt any description: I assure you that the perfection of character and even drawing, the astounding finish, the glory of colour

[1]) Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters, edited by W. M. Rossetti p. 13.

and above all the pure religious sentiment and ecstatic poetry of these works is not to be conceived or described. Even in seeing them the mind is at first bewildered by such Godlike completeness, and only after some while has elapsed, can at all analyse the causes of its awe and admiration. Van Eyck's picture at the Gallery may give you some idea of the style adopted by Memling in these great pictures; but the effect of light and colour is much less poetical in Van Eyck's; partly owing to *his* being a more sober subject and an interior, but partly also, I believe, to the intrinsic superiority of Memling's intellect. In the background of the first compartment there is a landscape more perfect in the abstract lofty feeling of nature than anything I have ever seen. The visions of the third compartment are wonderfully mystic and poetical."

This quotation is particularly interesting, because one finds in it the expression of the artistic ideals of the young Pre-Raphaelites. They wanted to have intellect, ideas; they wanted finish, beautiful colours, religious sentiment, mysticism and poetry. In Memling, whom Rossetti calls 'that stunner' they found the realisation of all their dreams.

The first founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were: Rossetti, Holman Hunt and Millais; they were soon joined by Collinson, Woolner and Stephens. William

Rossetti became secretary to the society; he lays down their aims in the following words [1]): 1. To have genuine ideas to express, 2. to study Nature attentively so as to know how to express them, 3. to sympathise with what is direct and serious and heartfelt in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learned by rote, and 4. to produce thoroughly good pictures and statues.

Both Holman Hunt and Millais, though only twenty and nineteen years old, had already produced more than Rossetti, who was twenty-one; but Rossetti was the best talker among them, had more ideas and could proselytise better.

When their aims and ideas became known and their work was exhibited, they got much attention in the press; they were admired by many lovers of art in England and America, but were also much criticised and abused.

Ruskin soon became a warm admirer of the Pre-Raphaelites and the patron of Rossetti and also of Miss Siddal, Rossetti's pupil and later his wife; he assisted both of them, as much as he could, to reach fame: he bought Rossetti's pictures and advised others to buy them, spoke and wrote in praise of the young artists and gave them finantial support.

[1]) Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Letters and Memoir, p. 135.

Among the detractors of the Pre-Raphaelites was Buchanan, who, under the name of Maitland, contributed an article to *The Contemporary Review* [1]) on the occasion of the publication of Rossetti's *Poems*, 5th edition. He accused the Pre-Raphaelites of spreading disease by their low morals; he acknowledged that they had genius for colour, but asserted that they had disregard for perspective. Rossetti's poetic and pictorial work he called 'a morbid deviation from healthy forms of life'; in its beautiful form and colours he found but 'indifference to sorrow and the deeper things of life'. He called the school the 'Fleshly School of Art', an appellation that greatly vexed and irritated Rossetti. Later Buchanan withdrew this criticism as unjust; he wrote in 1883: "I freely admit that Mr. Rossetti was never a 'Fleshly Poet' at all." In 1880 Buchanan had even dedicated his romance *God and the Man* to Rossetti. Any careful student of the records, letters and diaries concerning the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and of the work of its members, will admit that no low moral standard prevailed among them; it was a pity that Buchanan did not realise this sooner, but waited nine years before apologising for the wrong he had done.

After the first years of fervour were over Rossetti

[1]) October 1871.

lost some of his enthusiasm for the Brotherhood. In a letter written to Mr. Ernest Chesneau [1]), a French literary man, he deprecated being called the head of the school: "Loin d'être chef de l'Ecole je puis à peine me reconnaître comme y appartenant", he wrote, and to a lady who, about the year 1870 inquired if he was a Pre-Raphaelite, he is reported to have said that he was not an 'ite' of any kind, merely a painter. [2])

Among the artists who, though not belonging to the Brothers, shared their views and ideas, were, besides Ford Madox Brown, William Morris and Burne Jones. In the Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters, edited by William Rossetti, several well-known men of letters are mentioned as closely connected and in sympathy with the Brotherhood, among them Coventry Patmore, Robert Browning and Tennyson. Carlyle is reported to have said: These Pre-Raphaelites they talk of are said to copy the thing as it is, or invent it as they believe it must have been; now there's some sense and hearty sincerity in this. It's the only way of doing anything fit to be seen."

"To copy the thing as it is" was of course not the purpose of the artists. Mr. Theodore Watts in his article on Rossetti in the *Encyclopaedia Brittannica* tells how

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[1]) 7 Nov. 1868.

[2]) Dante G. Rossetti, Letters with a Memoir by W. M. Rossetti, p. 135.

Ruskin, equally misguidingly, declared the purpose of the Pre-Raphaelites to be to "paint nature as it is with the help of modern science." What they did want to do was put down in an injunction printed on the cover of the first number of *The Germ*: "that an entire adherence to the simplicity of nature will be encouraged and enforced."

The *Germ* was the paper that represented the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. It was in July 1849 that the plan to publish a magazine first arose. After long hesitation between various more or less suitable titles that of *Germ* was at last chosen. In the first number appeared Gabriel Rossetti's *My Sister's Sleep* and his prose story, *Hand and soul*; also Christina's *Dreamland* and *An End.* To no. 2 Christina contributed *A Pause of Thought, A Song* and *The Testimony.* In 1850 it was found that the expense of the publication of the paper, — No. 3 and No. 4 of which appeared under the name of *Art and Poetry, being Thoughts towards Nature,* — was too great for it to be continued; it died with its fourth number.

Christina Rossetti took a great interest in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. She knew all the members of it and was, for a while, in more intimate relation to one of them, James Collinson. In some of her letters written at the time when the Brotherhood had just been started,

we find evidence of her being in the know of its affairs. In a letter written by her to William on 25 August 1849 she speaks of the painter Orchard's 'Criticism on Gabriel's picture'; Mr. Orchard was a contributor to the *Germ*; in letters dated 31 August 19 Sept. 26 Sept 1849 and 14 Aug. 1850 we find more proofs of her close connection with the concerns of the Brotherhood. Her great admiration for the works produced by several of its members finds expression in these letters. She made herself useful by sitting to her brother Gabriel for several of his pictures; in 'The Girlhood of Mary Virgin', for instance Mary was painted from Christina. In William Rossetti's *Memoir* which has been mentioned before, there is a list of all the portraits made of Christina and ten out of these were done by her brother. [1])

We have a proof that Christina's sense of fun was brought to bear on the Brotherhood. She wrote some amusing lines on it which are published in her collected Poems. [2])

1.

"The two Rossettis (brothers they)
And Holman Hunt and John Millais,
With Stephen chivalrous and bland,

[1]) See Memoir XI.

[2]) Poetical works p. 424.

And Woolner in a distant land —
In these six men I awestruck see
Embodied the great P. R. B.
D. G. Rossetti offered two
Good pictures to the public view;
Unnumbered ones great John Millais
And Holman more than I can say,
William Rossetti, calm and solemn
Cuts up his brethren by the column.

2.

The P. R. B. is in its decadence;
For Woolner in Australia cooks his chops,
And Hunt is yearning for the land of Cheops;
D. G. Rossetti shuns the vulgar optic;
While William M. Rossetti merely lops
His B's in English disesteemed as Coptic;
Calm Stephens in the twilight smokes his pipe,
But long the dawning of his public day;
And he at last the champion, great Millais,
Attaining academic opulence,
Winds up his signature with A. R. A.
So rivers merge in the perpetual sea;
So luscious fruit must fall when over-ripe;
And so the consummated P. R. B.

In Christina's poetry some Pre-Raphaelistic features can be detected. In the first place she was unconventional as will be conceded by the readers of her *Goblin Market* and as is apparent from the form of all her poetry of which more will be said later. She also paid some attention to detail; as an example may be mentioned the fourth and following stanzas of *From House to Home:*

"My castle stood of white transparent glass
Glittering and frail with many a fretted spire,
But when the summer sunset came to pass
It kindled into fire." etc.

And as another example the following lines of the *Prince's Progress:*

"Red and white poppies grow at her feet,
The blood-red wait for sweet summer heat,
Wrapped in bud-coats, hairy and neat;
But the white buds swell, one day they will burst,
Will open their death cups drowsy and sweet: —
Which will open the first?"

In the last quotation we find the Pre-Raphaelite love

of beautiful, bright colours, which is also illustrated by the following quotation from *I have a Message unto thee:*

> "Green sprout the grasses,
> Red blooms the mossy rose,
> Blue nods the harebell,
> Where purple heather blows.
> The water-lily, silver white
> Is living fair as light."

Christina shared her brother Gabriel's admiration for the magnificence and wealth of detail found in Keats's poetry. Yet it must be observed that in most of Christina's poetry neither luxurious setting nor wealth of detail is to be found; nor is rich colouring a conspicious feature of the greater part of her work. This is partly due to the greater importance that spiritual things had to her than earthly things, partly to the fact that much of her poetry was meant for children and was consequently simple.

Like the Pre-Raphaelite artists and those who sympathised with them, Christina, though only occassionally, sought inspiration in the Middle Ages. In her *Prince's Progress* we have a romantic story of unfulfilled love; the bride and her maidens are waiting for the traditional

strong prince, the bridegroom, who comes slowly travelling on horseback, fording rivers, crossing tracts of waste land and even lodging in the cave of a sorcerer who sets him a task. But the Prince is not the real, genuine hero of the romantic story, nor is the tale a true medieval tale, such as Morris understood the art of writing; the poet criticises her hero, he is not the 'chevalier sans peur et sans reproche' but a waverer, weak of purpose, almost a modern man of the world, too polite to say 'no' to those who invite him to linger. We also have a feeling that the story is not told for its own sake, but for the moral that lies in it: it is wrong to be weak of purpose. Another of the few objective poems that Christina Rossetti wrote, *A Royal Princess*, is not a genuine romantic tale either; the spirit it breathes is one of rebellion against the splendour of courtly life. The princess is weary of her fountains that cast up perfumes, of her ivory chair and of her father's vassals that are her courteous servants. She seeks fellowship with the people, and wishes to share her possessions with them.

Reminiscent of the middle ages are also a few gloomy ghost-poems that Christina wrote: *A Chilly Night*, *The Hour and the Ghost* and *Shut out*, and her *Ballad*, which is her single attempt at writing a poem of the class in which her brother excelled.

But if, in Christina Rossetti's work, we only occasionally find reminiscenses of what may be called the romantic side of the middle ages, the religious sense, that was also a feature of those times, is more strongly expressed in *her* work than in that of any of the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. It is true that several pictures produced by these painters have religious subjects. Holman Hunt painted the 'Light of the World', 'Ruth and Boas' and 'Christian Missionary and Druids'; Millais the 'Carpenter's Shop'; Ford M. Brown 'Christ washing Peter's Feet'; Collinson made an etching of the 'Child Jesus' and Gabriel Rossetti painted the 'Girlhood of Mary Virgin' and 'Annunciation'. Gabriel also wrote some religious poetry, but in his *Blessed Damozel*, in his *Ave* and in the sonnets that he wrote on sacred pictures we feel, as we do in the above-mentioned paintings, that it is rather the picturesque side of religion that the artists aims at than the expression of religious feelings or convictions. Also in the works of Morris and Swinburne we look in vain for these feelings.

But Christina who, as her brother William says in the *Memoir*, had the makings of a nun in her, has expressed in her poetry the deep religious sense characteristic of medieval times, rather than of the latter half of the nineteenth century in which she lived. To be convinced of

this one need but read such poems as: *A Christmas carol, A Testimony, The Three Enemies, The convent Threshold,* and indeed all her devotional poetry.

A characteristic feature of the Pre-Raphaelites was a certain melancholy. Gabriel Rossetti was gloomy; a depressing atmosphere clings to his works. The productions of Brown, Hunt, Millais and Collinson are all serious. Christina was melancholy in many of her utterances and sadness is felt in the works of William Morris who stood very near to the Pre-Raphaelites. The general cause of the depression felt by all these sensitive artistic natures must have been the discrepancy between the ideals of beauty existing in their imagination, and life as they saw it around them. In Ford Madox Brown's Diary [1]) we find an entry on 7th August 1855 in which he expresses his thoughts on life after visiting Stafford House with D. G. Rossetti. He writes: "How strange a place is this world. Only those seem to possess power who don't know how to use it. What an accumulation of wealth and impotence! Is this what is gained by stability and old institutions? Is it for this that a people toils and wears out its myriad lives? For such heaping up of bad taste, for such gilding of hideousness, for such exposure of imbecility, as this sort of thing is! Oh how much more beautiful would six model

[1]) Ruskin, Rossetti, Pre-Raphaelitisme, edited by W. M. Rossetti, p. 41.

labourers' cottages be, built by a man of skill for £ 100 each!"

This critic of his time does not stand alone in his unfavourable opinion. Carlyle, whose pessimistic views about the world of his days are well known; Mrs. Browning who raised her voice on behalf of the over-worked factory-children; Morris who hated a civilisation characterised by intense industrial and commercial competition, which forced its workers to drudge in factories for less than a living wage while the owners of these factories accumulated great riches; Ruskin who lifted his voice against his materialistic contemporaries whose chief concern seemed to be money-making, — to mention some of the men who were connected with the Pre-Raphaelites, — are on his side.

A few lines may be quoted here from Mr. C. F. G. Masterman's book: *The Condition of England.* In the first chapter, on p. p. 5 and 6, we are told what was the opinion of some great Victorian writers of the England of their day. We read of the people of the time that they 'rejoiced that they lived in nineteenth century England'. But to the prophets of their age they were unclean from crown of head to sole of foot, a people who had visibly exhausted the patience of God. You may choose your verdict where you please — in Carlyle's

"torpid, gluttonous, sooty, swollen, and squalid England," given up to the "deaf stupidities and to the fatalities that follow, likewise deaf;" or, in Ruskin's interpretation of the "storm cloud" as a symbol of the moral darkness of a nation that has blasphemed the name of God deliberately and openly, and has done iniquity by proclamation, every man doing as much injustice to his brother as it was in his power to do. "You may accept the condemnation kindly, as in Meredith's "folly perpetually sliding into new shapes in a society possessed of wealth and leisure, with many whims, many strange ailments and strange fancies;" the condemnation plaintive, as in Arnold's "brazen prison," in which most men, with "heads bent o'er their toil," languidly "their lives to some unmeaning taskwork give," the condemnation defiant and rejoicing, as in Morris's: "Civilisation which I *know* now is destined to perish; what a joy to think of." You may find it rising to a rather shrill shriek in the later Tennyson, with his protest against the city children — who "soak and blacken soul and sense in city slime" — with his calling upon vastness and silence to swallow up the noises of his clamorous, intolerable day.'

It was to the artistic and political reformation of this society that William Morris devoted many years of his life.

As these two poets, Christina Rossetti and William Morris, were both in close relation to the Pre-Raphaelites and sympathised with their purposes, but in almost all other respects formed a complete contrast with each other, it may be interesting, for a clearer understanding of Christina's nature, to carry the comparison between them a little further.

Morris was active, strong, robust and warm-blooded; he loved life passionately and had an enjoyment, almost amounting to pain, for many sides of it. He saw that other people did not feel this keen enjoyment, nay that to them existence frequently became a burden. This suffering seemed to a great extent needless to him, as he knew that much of it had its origin in the social conditions made by man and which man, consequently, ought to be able to change. He also thought that the absence of joy in life was due to a want of beauty in people's daily surroundings. He felt that, as an artist, it was his duty to do his utmost to change into beauty the ugliness that he saw around him and that daily hurt him in the things made by man. To achieve this purpose he turned his hand to almost any branch of decorative industry, to weaving, dyeing, embroidery, designing of furniture, of glass and of wall-hangings, to decorative painting, to book-printing and book-binding, to the

preserving of beautiful old buildings, to making church-windows and to architecture. What is very remarkable is that this many-sided artist did all these things to perfection; as an artist he was a complete success; where he failed was in his endeavours to bring about social reform, endeavours to which he devoted much ardour and far too much of his time. It is not strange that a man with so many interests found life too short; though he rose at four in the morning and worked hard all day, he still regretted that he could do no more. When, at a comparatively early age, he felt his bodily strength decreasing, a great sadness came over him, because he had to leave so many things undone. To the last he was active and crowded as much work as he could into those final years. Death seemed to him the destroyer of everything worth having, of his happy home-life with his wife and daughters, of all the beauty he still felt it in him to create. He did not believe in a future existence; this life contained all he prized so highly and there was nothing to reconcile him to the loss of it.

Christina Rossetti was not by any means active, strong robust or warm-blooded; her delicacy forbade any strenuous occupation or much bodily exercise. The interest she took in those living around her chiefly concerned

their spiritual well-being. She took some luke-warm interest in the questions of vivisection and woman-suffrage, it is true, but on the whole social reform did not find an adherent in her. She did not, like Morris, stand in the middle of life, but rather stood apart from the world. Her thoughts were too much occupied with the promised land on the other side of the grave for her to think it worth her while to do much to improve this earthly existence. She once made a feeble attempt, it is true, to do decorative work; she even called upon Morris to give her his opinion about a design she had attempted to make, [1]) but his criticism, though very kind and not discouraging, was enough to turn her away from this kind of occupation. Henceforth it was only in poetry that her artistic feelings found utterance. This poetry was to a great extent of a devotional character. With Morris's many-sidedness her one-sided work forms a strong contrast.

Christina was also aware of the social and artistic iniquities of her time, but she looked for a remedy elsewhere than where Morris tried to find it. She thought that in religion lay man's only salvation. To escape from the world, that had little attraction for her she withdrew into the land of beauty that she created in her imagi-

[1]) see p. 39.

nation: "Methinks the ills of life I fain would shun" she sings in the eighth of her *Sonnets written to Bouts rimés;* also in *I do set my Bow in the Cloud* her longing to leave the world finds expression:

"He, from the heaven-gates built above,
Has looked on me in perfect love,
From the heaven walls, to me he calls,
With Cherubim and Seraphim
And angels: yea, beholding Him."

In this poem and, still more strongly, in the impassioned last stanza of *The Martyr*, the longing of the human soul for heaven is felt. It is interesting to compare these poems with Gabriel's *Blessed Damosel*, where the soul, that has entered into the state of bliss, looks back with longing on the earth which has not lost its attraction to it. Though Morris differed greatly from Gabriel it appears that in spiritual matters he had more in common with him than with Gabriel's sister.

To Christina Death was not the destroyer of many things of great value, as it was to Morris, but rather the reliever from the burden of existence; its aspect, with which she had become familiar in her periods of serious illness, did not seem so forbidding to her as it naturally did to a strong, healthy man as Morris was.

To end this comparison one more great difference between these two artists may be mentioned. The poetical works that Morris produced were objective, which is in keeping with the fact that his mind was greatly occupied with things outside himself; Christina's poetry was chiefly subjective.

To sum up briefly Christina Rossetti's position with regard to the Pre-Raphaelite movement we may say that she had Pre-Raphaelite tendencies, but that she had them in a very moderate degree. She was not conventional; bright colouring and attention to detail are to be found in some of her poetry and there is evidence in her work to prove that she took delight in medieval romance. In her nun-like attitude to life and in the religious feeling expressed in her poetry she may be said to represent the religious side of the medieval revival.

VI.

POETRY.

All those who knew Christina Rossetti well, agree that her manner of writing poetry was spontaneous. As has been mentioned before, her brother Gabriel said that she was more spontaneous than himself. Her younger brother William writes in the 'Memoir': "something impelled her feelings or came into her head, and her hand obeyed the dictation". For the rest she was so reticent that even those living in the same house with her, knew very little about the conception and development of her poetry. The only characteristic particular that is told is, that she used to write her productions very neatly, — in a handwriting that never deteriorated, as it so often does with literary people, — into nice little note-books, bound in green, red and black.

In the poetry of Christina Rossetti there are two principal motives: Love and Religion.

The general tone of her poems is serious, even sad: frequently death is their subject. But here and there, suddenly, like a ray of sunshine from a clouded sky, her humour breaks forth.

In the Love poems we seek in vain for the exul-

Roses and Roses.

Where shall I find a white rose blowing? —
Out in the garden where all sweets be. —
But out in my garden the snow was snowing
And never a white rose opened for me.
Nought but snow and a wind were blowing
And snowing.

Where shall I find a blush rose blushing? —
On the garden wall or the garden bed. —
But out in my garden the rain was rushing
And never a blush rose raised its head.
Nothing glowing, flushing or blushing:
Rain rushing.

Where shall I find a red rose budding? —
Out in the garden where all things grow. —
But out in my garden a flood was flooding
And never a red rose began to blow.
Out in a flooding what should be budding?
All flooding!

Now is winter and now is sorrow,
No roses but only thorns today:
Thorns will put on roses tomorrow
Winter and sorrow scudding away.
No more winter and no more sorrow
Tomorrow.

Christina G. Rossetti

MS. of poem by Christina Rossetti

tation, the frenzy of happy love; we generally find the sad or unsatisfactory and disappointing side of it expressed, also frequently a yearning for the happiness that has been irretrievably lost or the sorrow of unrequited passion.

As Christina's religion imbued her whole being, her poetry is saturated with it, so that it is difficult to draw a line between her religious and non-religious poems. For the same reason it is impossible to understand her work unless something is known of the religious views she held.

Christina Rossetti belonged to the church of England and had the ideas of the orthodox members of that church. Her conception of God and the Universe was dualistic, not monistic or pantheistic. We do not find in her poetry the expression of a sense of spiritual mysteries haunting nature as we find, for instance, in Thomson's introductory poem to the *Seasons*, in Pope's *Essay on Man* and in Wordsworth's poetry. As an example may be quoted a passage from the *Lines composed a few Miles above Tintern Abbey:*

"And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns
And the round ocean, and the living air
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts."

Christina Rossetti did not feel or imagine God as inherent in, as part of the universe or as forming one substance with it, but as a Being outside herself, opposite to herself and to His creation, dwelling apart in heaven. She hoped to reach Him through death.

This earthly life seemed vanity to her, a weary time of trial, that had to be struggled through to reach eternal bliss.

"Vanity of Vanities, the Preacher says
All things are vanity"

she says in her beautiful sonnet, entitled *The one Certainty.*

And in the first lines of: *After this the Judgement;*

"As eager homebound traveller to the goal
Or steadfast seeker on an unsearched main,
Or martyr panting for an aureole
My fellow-pilgrims pass me, and attain
That hidden mansion of perpetual peace
Where keen desire and hope dwell free from pain".

And in *Life and Death:*

"Life is not sweet. One day it will be sweet
To shut our eyes and die."

The ever recurring burden of the devotional poems is: "death is better far than life", or even, as we read in *For Advent*, "Death is better far than birth."

That other feelings more worthy of the artist, find utterance also in this devotional poetry, may be proved by the beautiful first stanza of the above mentioned work.

"Sweet, sweet sound of distant waters falling
On a parched and thirsty plain;
Sweet, sweet song of soaring skylark, calling
On a sun to shine again;
Perfume of the rose, only the fresher
For past fertilising rain;
Pearls amid the sea, a hidden treasure
For some daring hand to gain;
Better, dearer than all these
Is the earth beneath the trees;
Of a much more priceless worth
Is the old, brown common earth."

Very often there is a note of despondency in her religious works. In *The Heart knoweth its own Bitter-*

ness, of which William Rossetti says that few things written by his sister contain more of her innermost self, she speaks of her longing for a kind of happiness not to be found in the world:

"Not in this world of hope deferred,
This world of perishable stuff;
Eye hath not seen, nor ear hath heard
Nor heart conceived that full 'enough'.
Here harvests fail, here breaks the heart,
There God shall join and no man part."

In *A Better Resurrection* she complains:

"I have no wit, no words, no tears;
My heart within me, like a stone
Is numbed too much for hopes or fears."

Her humility is touchingly revealed in: 'The Lowest Place':

"Give me the lowest place; not that I dare
Ask for that lowest place, but Thou hast died
That I might live and share
Thy glory by thy side."

The second stanza of this poem was inscribed on the poet's tomb-stone:

"Give me the lowest place; or if for me
That lowest place too high, make one more low
Where I may sit and see
My God and love Thee so."

Her complete surrender to the will of God speaks from the following lines of *Weary in Well-Doing*

"I would have gone, God bade me stay:
I would have worked; God bade me rest."

We find all the generally accepted doctrines of the orthodox Christian church in Christina's devotional poetry. In: *The Love of Christ which passeth Knowledge* we read how Christ took upon him the sin of the world and was sacrificed to reconcile God to his erring creatures:

"I Holy one, put on thy guilt and shame
I, God, Priest, Sacrifice.

A thief upon My right hand and My left
Six hours alone, athirst, in misery;
At length, in death, one smote My heart and cleft
A hiding-place for thee."

By her own endeavours, by ethical means, she wants to gain the final reward. She is ready to submit her will to that of her Saviour:

"I will accept thy will to do and be,"

she sings in *A bruised Reed shall He not break*, and Christ promises to endeavour to save even those who are too weak and wavering to wish to choose His love. The three Enemies of devout Christians: the Flesh, the World and the Devil, have to be conquered. Heaven the poet describes in the way it has often been pictured by the devout. So for instance in: *Paradise:*

"Once in a dream I saw the flowers
That bud and bloom in Paradise;"

and in: *Christian and Jew*, where we read that:

"Angels like rushes stand
About the wells of light"

and that: "White-winged cherubim,
Yet whiter seraphim,
Glow with intense fire of love"

and: "Angels, Archangels cry
One to other ceaselessly
(I hear them sing)
One "Holy, Holy, Holy," to their King."

The doctrine of the salvation by grace finds expression in the same poem:

"All precious souls are there
Most safe, elect by grace,
All tears are wiped for ever from their face."

The vileness of the world that has to be conquered is more than once referred to; so, for instance in the sonnet called: *The World.*

"By day she woos me soft, exceeding fair;
But all night as the moon so changeth she,
Loathsome and foul with hideous leprosy
And subtle serpents gliding in her hair.
By day she woos me to the outer air,
Ripe fruits, sweet flowers, and full satiety.
But through the night, a beast she grins at me
A very monster void of love and prayer."

The tragedy of her spiritual life was that she did not feel assured of the final reward; she feared to the very last, even on her deathbed, that in the end she might be found unworthy.

She fully believed in the religion as revealed in the Bible; she took no interest in Biblical criticism; perhaps she was not intellectual and philosophical enough to reason about these matters. To her the creed taught to her in her youth was entirely satisfactory. The God she worshipped was what Shelley would have called the

Tyrant who desired sacrifice; she was content to suffer, she did not desire to be free from this bondage. Her sole hope was that after a life of austere self-denial she might, through the grace of Christ, the mediator, attain to the perfect rest of eternal bliss. She hoped that in this future life the souls would meet and recognise each other, either immediately after death or later, after the day of judgment; she also believed in a resurrection of the body, so that cremation seemed wrong to her.

The beauties of this earth were not indifferent to her artistic soul, but seen in the light of eternal beauty, they seemed of little value to her; in *Consider the Lilies of the Field* she writes:

"The rose saith in the dewy morn:
I am most fair
Yet all my loveliness is born
Upon a thorn."

In *Sweet Death* we read: "The sweetest blossoms die", and: "Sweet is life but sweeter death", and in the last stanza:

"Better than Beauty and than Youth
Are Saints and Angels, a glad company."

Her brother William was right in saying that she would have made a good nun. He tells us in the Memoir

that later in life her religious strictness went so far that she shut her mind to almost all things save the Bible and the admonitions of priests. Her spiritual life would have been happier, she would probably not have been so subject to her fits of depression, if she had had the mystic's awareness of the constant nearness of her God. As it was, she suffered the same qualms and misgivings as the poet Cowper whose religious convictions seem to have been very similar to hers. In his poem entitled *The Castaway* he gives expression to the same religious melancholy that often tortured Christina. Their God was a revengeful and severe God, who might even cast out into eternal darkness those of his creatures who had striven earnestly to reach perfection.

Christina was convinced that human beings were vile and unworthy and only to be saved by grace; she herself was the most unworthy of sinners. "Give me the lowest place" she prays.

Notwithstanding her strict religious convictions she was not intolerant to those who did not share her views. She was lenient to others but austere to herself; self-denial was her joy and she took herself severely to task for any real or imagined backsliding.

Her heaven lay beyond the grave; not in this life could perfect happiness be found. She did not hold that

in ourselves we carry heaven or hell, that we may be blessed now, that this life is beautiful and worthy of being gratefully accepted.

It is not very easy to answer the question whether Christina Rossetti was a mystic or not, because the term 'mysticism' is hardly susceptible of exact definition; some call mysticism what others describe as religiousness in the usual sense. Still if we read what is to be found under the heading 'Mysticism' in the Encyclopædia Brittanica, there would seem to be little doubt that Christina Rossetti ought not to be considered a mystic.

In this article we find the following:

'It (mysticism) appears in connection with the endeavour of the human mind to grasp the divine essence or the ultimate reality of things and to enjoy the blessedness of actual communion with the Highest. The first is the philosophical side of mysticism, the second the religious side. The thought that is most intensely present with the mystic is that of a supreme all pervading and indwelling power in whom all things are one. Hence the speculative utterancess of mystics are always more or less pantheistic in character.' (As regards the first part of this definition, Christina Rossetti was too little intellectual to philosophise on religion; as to the latter part, she could not be called pantheistic, for she did not

conceive of the universe as being the dwelling place of the supreme power; her God dwelled in his heaven, apart from his creation.)

'On the practical side mysticism maintains the possibility of direct intercourse with the Being of beings, intercourse, not through any external media, such as historical revelation, oracles, answers to prayer and the like, but by a species of ecstatic transfusion or identification in which the individual becomes in very truth partaker of the divine nature. God ceases to be an object to him and becomes an experience. In the writings of the mystics ingenuity exhausts itself in the invention of phrases to express the closeness of this union.' (There is nothing in Christina Rossetti's writings, nor in the testimony of her relations and friends that indicates such endeavours or experiences on her side. On the contrary, to her, historic revelation and prayer were the means to reach the Deity, and not ecstatic transfusion. One might say that she was too matter-of-fact and that what might be called her sound common sense made her unfit for this side of religion.)

'In full-blown mysticism the individual may be said to be deprived of the right which belongs to him as an ethical personality.' (With regard to this part of the definition it may be observed that Christina Rossetti's

ethical personality was always endeavouring to reach higher perfection through self-correction.)

'Mysticism strains after the present realisation of an ineffable union.' (Christina expected this union to take place after death.)

'The union which sound religious teaching presents as realised by the submission of the will and ethical harmony of a whole life, is there reduced to a passive experience. The sense of personality is weakened; the mystic so vividly realises God that he is lost in the excess of divine light.'

This last part of the definition no more applies to Christina Rossetti than what precedes. Her personality was strong and as we know that she tried, all her life, to submit her will to that of her God and to achieve ethical harmony, the conclusion that she was not a mystic does not seem unfounded.

As has been mentioned above, she was lenient in her judgment of others. Only in the poetry of her early youth do we find some severity and harshness and this may be condoned on the plea that the young are often hard in their attitude towards errors, because they are still ignorant and inexperienced. From the first she was appreciated as a poet of great refinement by a certain class of readers. The subject matter of her poems is, on

the whole, too abstract, too restricted and too uniform for the general taste. To devout minds her work has been a great help and consolation.

That death so frequently forms the subject of her poems and that her mind seemed so little antagonistic to this, to healthy people as a rule so little attractive subject, is no doubt to a great extent owing to the fact that during her frequent and severe illnesses she so often stood face to face with the enemy of life that she had become familiar with his appearance. He became to her the reliever from the burden of this earthly life and the means to enter the great happiness that she felt sure was in store for all believers. That there is not a more jubilant tone in the poems which deal with this after life, finds its cause in her fear that she might not prove worthy to inherit this great bliss; her humility and doubt of herself made her afraid to count on having a share in the great happiness promised hereafter.

Christina Rossetti began to write poetry in 1842. Her grandfather Polidori published her first juvenile effusions; later they were illustrated in water colours by Christina herself. In a preface, *A few Words to the Readers*, Mr. Polidori says:

"As her maternal grandfather I may be excused for desiring to retain these early spontaneous efforts in a

permanent form and for having silenced the objections urged by her modest diffidence and persuaded her to allow me to print them for my own gratification at my own private press; and though I am ready to acknowledge that the well-known partial affection of a grandparent may perhaps lead me to overrate the merit of her youthful strains, I am still confident that the lovers of poetry will not wholly attribute my judgment to partiality."

Mr. Polidori must be considered to have been right in saving these early productions from destruction, for there are among them poems of such great melodiousness and imagination that one wonders how any one so young could produce them.

The same subjects that constantly recur in her later work one finds already treated here: religion and love, death and nature are the chief, while here and there, at rare intervals, her fun finds expression.

In these juvenilia the religious faith of the girl poet appears in a short *Hymn* written when she was thirteen; in *Earth and Heaven* where she compares the beauties of the earth which cannot satisfy the human soul, with those of heaven, which are indestructible. In *Burial Anthem* we find, besides the expression of sadness and regret at the loss of a beloved one, the rather morbid idea, in one so young, — the poet was fifteen when this

piece was composed, — that those who are left behind have still their 'weary race to run',

"In doubt and want and sin and pain,
Whilst thou wilt never sin again,
And it is better far for thee
To reach at once thy rest,
Than share with us earth's misery
Or tainted joy at best."

In *Mother and Child* the child is thinking of heaven and wants to go there and wait for the coming of the mother. In *The Martyr* the certainty is expressed that the believing soul has of the existence of God:

"On she went, on faster,
Trusting in her Master,
Feeling that His eye watched o'er her lovingly;
He would prove and try her,
But would not deny her
When her soul had past, for His sake, patiently."

. . . . . .

"On she went, on quickly,
And her breath came thickly,
With the longing to see God coming pantingly;
Now the fire is kindled,
And her flesh has dwindled
Unto dust; — but her soul is mounting up on high."

and in the last two lines:

"Trouble lies behind her;
Satisfied with hopeful rest, and replete with God."

The end of the dramatic poem: *The Dying Man to his Betrothed* also expressed this trust of the dying Christian in his God.

In *The Time of Waiting* an unpleasant, harsh side of religious faith finds utterance. As has been said above, Christina Rossetti was still very young so that life had not yet had time to mellow her and make her tolerant. This alone could explain and excuse her expressing herself in the merciless, uncompromising terms sometimes adopted by narrow-minded believers. She says in this poem that life and joy are of short duration, that sorrow and care meet her on all sides; that on earth she finds dreariness and dearth, that the Holy Church is rent and yet, she adds, 'who tremble or repent?'

"All cry out with pleading strong:
'Vengeance, Lord', how long, how long
Shall we suffer this great wrong?"

and further: "When this world shall be no more,
The oppressors shall endure

The great vengeance which is sure.
And the sinful shall remain
To an endless death and pain;
But the good shall live again,
Never more to be oppressed."

No doubt she did not realise what 'endless death and pain' would mean. In *Will these Hands ne'er be clean* there is the same rigid and hard tone, witness the following lines of the last stanza:

"Though to thee earth shall be hell and breathe
Vengeance, yet thou shalt tremble more at death,
And one by one thy friends will learn to fear thee,
And thou shalt live without a hope to cheer thee,
Lonely amid a thousand, chained though free,
The curse of memory shall cling to thee,
Ages may pass away, worlds rise and set,
But thou shalt not forget."

The love-poems in this early volume are many. In *Love and Hope* the higher kind of love, the perfect love is sung, in *Love Ephemeral* the other kind of love which is as transitory as other things earthly that are all sullied and bear the seed of decay in them. That a girl of fifteen could write such poems as: *Love Attacked* and *Love Defended* is nothing short of

marvellous, especially if it is taken into consideration that she was not a great reader, so that she probably did not merely repeat the ideas she had read in other love-poetry. For the same reason the situation represented in *The Dying Man to his Betrothed* is astonishing, both as regards its choice as a subject and the way of its treatment. the strong but thwarted passion of the dying man makes the tone fierce in which he reproaches his unfaithful love with her betrayal:

"One word — 't is all I ask of thee;
One word — and that is little now
That I have learned thy wrong of me;
And thou too art unfaithful — thou!
O thou sweet poison, sweetest death,
O honey between serpent's teeth,
Breathe on me with thy scorching breath!

The last poor hope is fleeting now,
And with it life is ebbing fast;
I gaze upon thy cold white brow,
And loathe and love thee to the last.
And still thou keepest silence — still
Thou look'st on me: for good or ill
Speak out, that I may know thy will.

Thou weepest woman, and art pale
Weep not, for thou shalt soon be free;
My life is ending like a tale
That was, but never shall be more.
O blessed moments, ye fleet fast,
And soon the latest shall be past,
And she will be content at last."

Then follow some stanzas in which the dying man relents and his tone loses its harshness; he forgives and only begs her to think of him sometimes; he will pray for her love and wait till the everlasting day. If the date, 14 July 1846, were not affixed to this poem one would not believe it to be the work of a child of fifteen, both as regards its form, and the thoughts expressed in it.

The short, five-lined love poem, written in 1847, beginning "Love is all happiness, love is all beauty" sounds rather conventional; it makes the impression of being a little poem, written by way of practise, like the bous rimés that she was fond of trying her hand at.

Of the poem called *The Dream* the vanity of unreal love is the subject; when the love-dream is over, weariness alone remains:

"Oh, I am weary of life's passing show,
Its pageant and its pain,
I would I could lie down lone in my woe,
Ne'er to rise up again;
I would I could lie down where none might know;
For truly love is vain."

Eleanor reminds one of a little china figure of a prim, dainty lady, of the kind that decorated the escritoires of our grand-mothers. *Immalee* is the country-girl gathering thyme on the hills, living a free life amidst nature. *Isidora* is a monologue of a loving wife who, in the hour of her death, repents of her too great affection for her husband which makes it hard for her to give up earthly life; *Zora* is a monologue of a deserted woman who still loves her faithless lover. In *Heart's Chill Between* the longing of a woman for the lover who has deserted her finds expression, as it also does in *Death's Chill Between*; there is deep feeling in these poems such as we are astonished to find in one so young. Both these poems appeared in The Athenaeum of October 14 and 21, 1848.

The note of Death that so often sounds in her later poetry, is struck in: *The Martyr, The Dying Man to his Betrothed, The Dead Bride, Gone for ever, Night and*

Death, in the last line of which latter poem running: "Death is Life and Death alone," a thought is expressed that is repeated again and again in her works and that contains the essence of her faith.

In the very imaginative poem *The Dead City* the same theme is treated as in Morris's *The Writing on the Image*; it also reminds one of this poem in its Pre-Raphaelite attention to detail, and is remarkable for that reason. The poet wanders through a strange, mysterious wood, the birds fly around and with their 'everlasting' singing make the place less desolate; they are very tame for they steal the black-berries from the poet's hand; some have 'bodies like a flame' while some are 'pure and colourless as dew'. The birds have never seen a human being before; they have lived in happy solitude:

"Happy solitude, and blest
With beatitude of rest;
Where the woods are ever vernal,
And the life and joy eternal
Without death's or sorrow's test."

In this mystic wood, there is 'full beatitude' and imperishable life and all things are good there. The sun,

'never rising, never setting' shines warmly overhead. The poet forgets the time and wanders long in the 'leafy shade', till at last the trees get scarcer and the 'pale sun' shines with a 'strange, lurid sheen'. Then a great darkness spreads around; the poet goes on and at last sees a 'pallid light, like a star at dawn of day'. And drawing nearer sees a gate. This leads to a fair city of white stone. No one is seen in its streets; all the doors are wide open, the lattices swing to and fro in the wind, which whispers 'Go and see the end of pride'. Every house is empty, there is no one in the market-place. With a feeling of astonishment and awe the poet reaches the palace of the king. The beauties of it are described with Pre-Raphaelite precision:

"Golden was the turreting
And of solid gold the base.
The great porch was ivory
And the steps were ebony;
Diamond and chrysoprase
Set the pillars in a blase
Capitalled with jewelry."

The trees are all fresh and green, there is not a withered leaf to be seen on them, they are full of fruit

and flowers. At last the poet comes to a tent. Again the wind whispers:

"Enter in and look, and see
How for luxury and pride
A great multitude have died."

A splendid banquet is laid in this tent; on the large tables is rich and rare food:

"And each strange and luscious cate
Practised art makes delicate;
With a thousand fair devices,
Full of odours and of spices;
And a warm voluptuous state.
All the vessels were of gold,
Set with gems of worth untold.
In the midst a fountain rose
Of pure milk, whose rippling flows
In a silver basin rolled.
In green emerald baskets were
Sun-red apples, streaked and fair;
Here the nectarine and peach
And ripe plum lay, and on each
The bloom rested everywhere.
Grapes were hanging overhead,
Purple, pale, and ruby-red;

And in panniers all around
Yellow melons shone, fresh found,
With the dew upon them spread.
And the apricot and pear
And the pulpy fig were there,
Cherries and dark mulberries
Bunchy currants, strawberries
And the lemon wan and fair."

The poet goes on enumerating and describing all the wealth and luxury displayed at this banquet, the flowers and the jewelry, paying great attention to colour and form, so that we see the picture clearly before us. The guests are at last described sitting round the table as if spell-bound, they have all turned to stone. It seems to the poet that many of the silent guests look at her out of their immovable eyes and she wants to fly; but full of fear, she shuts her eyes and on opening them again she finds that all has vanished and that she is once more in the happy sunlight, wondering why she should have been allowed to see 'So much hidden mystery.' And then she "straightway knelt and prayed."

This poem seems very remarkable to me. It shows the Pre-Raphaelite characteristics referred to above and it also proves that Christina Rossetti could describe the

pleasures of nature, the singing of birds, flowers, fruit etc. with an appreciation equal to that of Keats. That she did not more frequently write in this strain, must find its origin in the fact that moral scruples prevented her from enjoying earthly things with the whole-hearted pleasure of that great poet. To her it must have seemed sinful to take great delight in the things which her artistic nature made her love and desire. In *The Dead City* the poet looks at all the pleasures the world has to offer, but she does not partake of any of them and when she has resisted the temptation she kneels and prays. Christina's religion and her artistic tendencies clash, the former gains the victory, but at the cost of her lightheartedness and natural happiness. In the thought expressed in this poem we find the keynote of her further life. Apart from a few imperfections the form of this poem is very beautiful. The weak endings of the third and fourth lines break the monotony of the otherwise almost too simple measure; the Pre-Raphaelites also frequently made use of weak final syllables.

The sparks of humour that light up Christina's youthful poetry are found in: *On Albina, Forget Me Not, On the Death of a Cat* and in the little couplet:

"'Come, cheer up, my lads, 't is to glory we steer'
As the soldier remarked whose post lay in the rear."

In Christina Rossetti's later poetry we find the same chords struck as in her juvenile work. Her views and ideas do not seem to have altered much after her twentieth year, though the manner in which she expressed them is without the harshness that marred some of her early productions. Her religious thought finds expression in her poems on death, on the vanity of all earthy things and the longing for rest; her love of the mysterious in her poems on ghosts, in *From House to Home, Sleep at Sea* and, in a wider sense, in the fairy tale *Goblin Market.* In the love poems the melancholy side of love finds most frequent treatment. Of her poems that have Death for their subject may be mentioned:

I do set my Bow in the Clouds, Death is swallowed up in Victory, Sweet Death, God is our Hope and Strength, When I am dead, my dearest, Dream Land, After Death, Rest, Sound sleep, At Home, Better So, Life and Death and *Sleeping at Last.*

The vanity of all earthly things is the theme of: *Vanity of Vanities, The Lowest Room, Sleep at Sea, One Certainty, A Testimony and others.*

In *I do set my Bow in the Cloud* death is the welcome reliever from earthly life and the opener of the gates of Heaven. In this dramatic monologue a dying Christian expresses his hope of a life hereafter.

Death is swallowed up in Victory is also dramatic, but is a dialogue between a sceptical questioner and the dying man, in which the latter answers questions concerning his faith and hope. It is good, says the dying man, to pass away with the spring: why should one long to see the autumn, when length of days is length of sorrow too. Only in heaven one is safe at last.

In *Sweet Death* there is the same attempt to make death appear desirable. "The sweetest blossoms die", says the poet. "Youth and beauty die, so be it, Better than beauty and than youth, Are Saints, and Angels, a glad company."

The beautiful *Song* beginning: 'When I am dead my Dearest' the melody of which is so perfect that one forgets to think of the melancholy contents, ends in the haunting lines:

"Haply I may remember
And haply may forget."

William Rossetti said that his sister meant to express here that she was uncertain in her mind about the state of the soul between death and resurrection, wondering whether there would be recognition in that stage, as shef elt sure there would be later in heaven. The state of the soul immediately after death is also

referred to in the poem called *After Death*. The dead woman lies alone on her bed; her lover bends over her and thinking that she is sleeping her last sleep and cannot hear him, says: "Poor child, poor child." He does not remove the cloth to see her face; he never loved her while she lived, but now he pities her and to her it is sweet to think, that he is still alive,

"And very sweet it is
To know he still is warm though I am cold."

In *At Home* one of her most perfectly beautiful poems, we read of a soul returning to its former home and finding the family gathered round the table, making merry; the talk is of life and what each wants to do the next day; the poor ghost feels that it does not belong to life any more, that it is forgotten; and 'sad to stay and yet to part how loth', it passes from the familiar room.

The delightfulness of the complete rest that death brings to the weary human traveller is sung in many of Christina Rossetti's poems, among others in: *Rest*, *Dream Land*, *Sound Sleep*, *Have Patience*, *Better So*, and *Sleeping at Last*.

In *Rest* we find again the period referred to between death and the day of the last judgment:

"Seal her sweet eyes weary of watching, Earth";

and: "She hath no questions, she hath no replies,
Hushed in and curtained with a blessed dearth
Of all that irked her from the hour of birth;
With stillness that is almost Paradise."

The same thought is expressed in:
Dream Land, the last stanza of which runs:

"Rest, rest, for evermore
Upon a mossy shore;
Rest, rest at the heart's core
Till time shall cease;
Sleep that no pain shall wake;
Night that no morn shall break,
Till joy shall overtake
Her perfect peace."

The same sentiment is found in *Sound Sleep* which is peculiar for the perfect balance there is between the two halves of each line, the effect of which on the ear is as that of the swinging of a pendulum:

"Some are laughing, some are weeping;
She is sleeping, only sleeping.
Round her rest wild flowers are creeping;
There the wind is heaping, heaping
Sweetest sweets of summer's keeping,
By the corn-fields ripe for reaping."

Better So means, better to be 'fast asleep at last' than still living. Here the soul is imagined to have passed to heaven at once without the intermediate period between death and the day of judgment:

> "Whilst I weep
> Angels sing around thy singing soul."

The same theme is treated in: *Sleeping at Last.*

> "Sleeping at last, the trouble and tumult over,
> Sleeping at last, the struggle and horror past
> Cold and white, out of sight of friend and of lover,
> Sleeping at last."

It is interesting to note that this last poem was written in 1893, while *Rest* and *Sound Sleep* date from 1849 and *Better So* from 1862. The same thought is expressed in words not very different; only the lines run more smoothly and the melody has got more equally perfect in the later poems. This proves again that the poet did not change much as regarded her thought-life with the advancing of her years. That the poems she produced in her youth were more uniformly melancholy than those of her later life may be explained by her having become reconciled to her state of ill-health and the disappointment life had brought her.

Have Patience with its:

"The present hath even less
Joy than the past,
And more cares fret it;
Life is a weariness
From first to last."

written in 1849, and *Looking Forward*, beginning: "Sleep, let me sleep, for I am sick of care", dated 1849 and *Endurance* 1850 the first two lines of which are:

"Yes, I too could face death and never shrink
But it is harder to bear hated life;"

are some of the many effusions written in gloomy moods. That this earthly life, when seen in the light of eternity, is nothing but vanity, is expressed in: *One certainty*, written in 1849, which is a paraphrase of the words of the Preacher: 'Vanity of vanities', the Preacher saith, and in *A Testimony:*

"I said of laughter, it is vain,
Of mirth I said what profits it?"
. . . . . .
"All things are vanity, I said
Yea vanity of vanities
The rich man dies; and the poor dies
The worm feeds sweetly on the dead."

This somewhat morbid poem dates from 1849 when the poet was eighteen years old.

The same morbid dwelling on the horrors of corruption is found in: *Two Thoughts of Death* beginning:

> "Her heart that loved me once is rottenness
> Now and corruption."

Sleep at sea reminds us, as regards its subject, of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*. The crew lie in a deep sleep that is to end in death, while the ship sails on and the pale spirits, flitting to and fro, from mast to mast, try in vain to wake them:

> "They sleep to death in dreaming
> Of length of days.
> Vanity of vanities
> The Preacher says,
> Vanity is the end
> Of all their ways."

These last lines rather spoil the poem by destroying the dreamy vagueness, and they are somewhat strangely hung on to bring in the idea of the vanity of earthly things.

That this poet writes of the imaginary world of ghosts may seem strange if one remembers that she was a High Church woman. It is difficult to say whether this was

merely a Pre-Raphaelite feature in her, an artistic attraction to the romantic, which had been fostered in her home, or a real belief in the existence of a world of spirits. When reading such poems as: *A Chilly Night, The Poor Ghost, The Ghost's Petition, The Hour and the Ghost* one feels inclined to think that there must be more behind it than mere romanticism, that there must be some belief in the existence of these disembodied beings, whereas such a poem as *A Nightmare* (Fragment) might make one inclined to judge the other way. Lines like: "Bloodred seaweeds drip along that coastland" and:

> "If I wake he hunts me like a nightmare:
> I feel my hair stand up, my body creep:
> Without light I see a blasting sight there
> See a secret I must keep,"

are too lurid, too much written with the purpose to create an atmosphere of horror to be the expression of genuine feeling. However, if one considers that Christina Rossetti was naive and childlike all her life, one can very well understand that she could both be a faithful churchwoman and a believer in ghosts. The mystery that surrounds human life always haunted her. She could not believe, as her brothers did, that the life of

human beings was as much a natural process as the life of animals and plants; she could sooner conceive that the human spirit, in the period between death and resurrection, should haunt the old familiar places of its former life. *Shut Out*, *After Death*, and *At Home* are examples of poems in which the return of such spirits is described.

The mysteriousness of human life also finds expression in one of her longer poems: *An Old-World Thicket* and in another: *A Ballad of Boding*.

The vague, mysterious first lines of *An Old-World Thicket* at once create the right atmosphere:

> "Awake or sleeping, for I know not which
> I was or was not mazed within a wood."

With Pre-Raphaelite love of colouring the birds are described:

> "Like spots of azure heaven upon the wing,
> Like downy emeralds that alight and sing,
> Like actual coals on fire."

The poet does not find pleasure in all this beauty, because the fear of death oppresses her and the transitoriness of earthly things; her heart revolts at the misery of human life which is "an imprisoning fate". Suffering

grows familiar "habit trains us not to break but bend" under it; the wood seems to mourn with her; but at last despair makes place for self-pity and resignation; looking up she sees the wood lie "in a glow".

"From golden sunset and from ruddy sky,
The Sun had stooped to earth though once so high;
Had stooped to earth, in slow,
Warm dying loveliness brought near and low."

The wood that had grown gloomy and dark, now not only regains its beauty, but is more lovely because the perfect peace of faith pervades it.

The first lines of the *Ballad of Boding* also tend to create the atmosphere of dream-life.

"There are sleeping dreams and waking dreams;
What seems is not always as it seems."

But here the moral is more clearly pointed. The servants of pleasure and the worshippers of Mammon go to perdition, unless they resolve in time to save their souls by denying the world and choosing the difficult way of duty.

'Love is all happiness, love is all beauty' Christina Rossetti sang in one of her early love-songs, yet most of her love poems deal with the sad side of love. The

Sequence of Sonnets entitled: *Monna Innominata* has for its subject the necessity of self-abnegation because an insurmountable barrier divides the lovers. Christina Rossetti writes a short preface to these sonnets in which she says that in her opinion the ladies to whom Dante and Petrarch dedicated their love-sonnets are too remote and remain too strange to us to attract us; that many unnamed ladies to whom the troubadours sang may have been prevented, by religious or other obstacles, from accepting and returning the love offered to them; and that if one of these ladies had been a poet she might have expressed the thoughts that are laid down in these sonnets. To Christina Rossetti it seems that the tragedy of love that is debarred from satisfaction has more poetical charm than the happy love which is the subject of the *Portuguese sonnets*. The self-denial of the imaginary lady of these sonnets, goes so far that, in one of the last of the series, she says that:

> "If there be any one can take my place
> And make you happy whom I grieve to grieve
> Think not that I can grudge it, but believe
> I do commend you to that nobler grace."

There is no doubt that it is Christina herself speaking

here, who had schooled hereself in complete self-repression and found satisfaction in her ascetism.

One of her longer poems: The *Prince's Progress* tells a love-story that ended sadly because the prince was a 'laggard in love' and lingered too long on the road. The uncanny, not entirely human, milkmaid, who cast her spell on him, makes the story more romantic. She reminds us of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and of the witches that played such a great part in William Morris's romantic stories. The medieval prince, taking his ease on his cushion and mat, at last takes up his staff and starts off to seek his bride, who is waiting for him patiently amidst her women.

"By her head lilies and rosebuds grow
The lilies droop, will the rosebuds blow?
The silver slim lilies hang the head low.

Red and white poppies grow at her feet
The blood-red wait for summer heat
Wrapped in bud-coats, hairy and neat;
But the white buds swell, one day they will burst,
Will open their death cups drowsy and sweet;
Which will open the first?"

The red poppies got no chance to open, for the prince tarried, first with the fairy milkmaid, then with a goblin

in a cave who was making the elixir of life, so that, when at last he arrived, the bride was dead. The last part of the poem, beginning: "Too late for love, too late for joy" is particularly melodious and beautiful. William Rossetti tells in a note that this song existed by itself, written at an earlier date, and that the poet wrote the first part to it at the suggestion of her brother Gabriel. He adds that this was almost the only occasion on which she wrote at the suggestion of some one else.

The *Convent Threshold* is also a love poem. The lovers are separated by a blood-feud and the woman rises above what she conceives to be their guilt and enjoins the man to lift his eyes heavenward and repent. She derives strength to renounce happiness in this life from her conviction that much greater bliss will follow on the other side of the grave, if penance is done on earth.

Rejected love is sung in *Twice:*

"I took my heart in my hand,
(O my love, O my love)
I said, Let me fall or stand
Let me live or die,
But this once hear me speak
(O, my love, O, my love)
Yet a woman's words are weak
You should speak, not I."

This is one of the few instances where Christina Rossetti makes use of the refrain, a medieval revival, much favoured by other romantic poets. Betrayed love finds expression in *Margery* where the lover deserts his bride, in *Sister Maude*, where the sister proves treacherous, in *Cousin Kate* where the sad fate is told of a cottage-maiden, lured to her lover's palace home and afterwards, when she is a mother, deserted for one fairer than herself. Here, as in some other poems, Christina Rossetti proves herself lenient to errors committed through love; her austerity to herself had not made her sour or bitter.

Likewise in *The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children* not the slip made by the lady is reproved, but her lack of courage to acknowledge her error before the world and to love her child as the deserted mother does in *Cousin Kate*.

Many more songs of unhappy love might be quoted, such as: *Two Parted, Light Love* and *Mirage*.

Not all the love-songs are sad. We find the lighter, more cheerful side of love in: *Listening*, a melodious little poem, which, once read, cannot easily be forgotten; also in *May:*

"I cannot tell you how it was
But this I know, it came to pass
Upon a bright and breezy day
When May was young, ah pleasant May!"

Happy love is also sung in: *Annie, In the Lane,* and *Love from the North.* The latter is a true romantic song of the strong man carrying off the bride from the church where she is marrying a gentler bridegroom, and forcing her, by the power of his will, to be his. *A Triad* is of an entirely different kind, it is almost sarcastic; it tells of three ladies who were incapable of true love; one was too coarse, the second too placid, the third too hungry after love, so that they all just missed it.

Christina felt ashamed of having written this poem, Mr. Mackenzie Bell tells in his Biography, and would not publish it at first. This was probably because in it a side of her nature was revealed which she thought it her duty to repress. It also appears in the coquettish *No thank you John.*

As examples of other poems (not love-songs) written in the lighter vein, may be mentioned the well-known and even parodied *A Birthday;* also *Maidensong,* and the curious *My Dream,* in which the story is told of a crocodile that wrings his hands and sheds 'appropriate tears.'

The result of the repression and restraint that Christina Rossetti forced upon herself was the unnatural gloom already referred to in the discussion of her poems on death. When reading such works as: *Up-Hill,*

Repining and *Introspection* one would think that life was nothing but weariness. In *Beauty is Vain*, the poet, whose artistic nature of course loved beauty, who created beauty and could not help creating beauty all her life, went so far as to say that beauty in a woman is of no importance at all, because in the end she must die.

Goblin Market is a poem which is not marred by unnatural sadness. It is entirely delightful. Here, and still more so in her poetry for children, published under the name of *Sing Song*, she puts herself on the level of a child. A symbolic meaning may easily be found in *Goblin Market* and has been read into it, but William Rossetti says that his sister more than once asserted that she did not mean anything profound by this fairy-tale. The closing lines of it:

"For there is no friend like a sister,
In calm or stormy weather;
To cheer one on the tedious way,
To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands."

are supposed to have been written with reference to

her sister Maria, for whom she felt great admiration and deep love and who often seems to have given her spiritual support, when she accused herself of real or imaginary backsliding. There are other, similar references to her sister in her poetry, so, for instance in *The Lowest Room* and in *Noble Sisters.*

It has been said in a preceding chapter that Christina had not much motherly love for children. Her delightful poetry written for children might be considered to disprove this statement. But this seeming contradiction can be explained by the poet's simple, childlike nature, which made it easy for her to see and imagine things as children would do. A clear example of this capacity to enter into the thoughts of children is *Winter,* the first two stanzas of which are:

"Sweet blackbird is silenced with chaffinch and thrush,
Only waistcoated robin still chirps in the bush:
Soft sun-loving swallows have mustered in force
And winged to the spice-teeming southlands their course.

Plump housekeeper dormouse has tucked himself neat
Just a brown ball in moss with a morsel to eat;
Armed hedgehog has huddled him into the hedge
White frogs scarce miss freezing deep down in the sedge."

This poem is also illustrative of the love which the poet, who in this respect resembled her brother Gabriel, bore birds and animals. Among birds it was chiefly the robins in their red waist-coats, the thrushes and the blackbirds, the wrens and owls that appealed to her.

"Wrens and robins in the hedge
Wrens and robins here and there
Building, perching, pecking, fluttering
Everywhere."

In *The Months, A Pageant,* we also hear of Robin Redbreast.

"In your scarlet waist-coat,
With your keen bright eye,
Where are you loitering
Wings made to fly!"

Of the other animals that particularly attracted her and found a place in her poetry may be mentioned the mole, the frog, the mouse, the lamb and the lizard; they occur in *From House to Home,* in *A Pageant, An Old World Thicket* etc.

Among the flowers it is the rose that she sang most frequently. Her preference is expressed in *Queen Rose:*

"Let others choose sweet jessamine,
Or weave their lily-crown aright,
And let who love it pluck and twine
Loose clematis, or draw delight
From meadowsweets' cluster downy white —
The rose, the perfect rose be mine."

In *A Year's Windfalls* a stanza is devoted to it:

"In the wind of sunny June
Thrives the red rose crop,
Every day fresh blossoms blow
While the first leaves drop;
White rose and yellow rose
And moss rose choice to find,
And the cottage cabbage rose
Not one whit behind."

There are many more references to the 'lovely red rose' in Christina's poetry. Her preference for this simple flower is characteristic. If one compares Christina Rossetti's way of approaching nature to that of other poets one is struck by the almost childlike simplicity of her attitude. Only the obvious qualities of natural objects are expressed. The poet had lived chiefly in London and had not had the same chances as, for instance,

Tennyson, Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats or William Morris to watch nature in her varying moods. Besides, she was perhaps too much taken up with spiritual things to give very much attention to natural life around her, a rose was just a rose to her; when she gave it an epithet she called it fair, or red, or lovely. The opening lines of *A Dirge* run:

> "She was as sweet as violets in the Spring,
> As fair as any rose in Summertime;"

she says elsewhere:

> "The rose that blushes rosy red
> She must hang her head"

and: "The rose with such a bonny blush
What has the rose to blush about."

In *Seasons* we are told no more out-of-the-way things than that in Spring the leaves are young, that in Summer the young birds leave the nest, that in Autumn the swallows fly across the seas and in Winter the sun shines on the snow; but all this is said in such a melodious way and there is such a very expressive reference to the sun as 'starved-looking', and to the dew-drops as 'gleaming like jewels hung on the boughs' that one cannot help

being pleased. Also in *Spring* we are told of the obvious features of that season; the young shoots appear, the thaw-wind blows, young grass springs on the plain, birds sing and pair. When the poet sings (in *Seasons*):

"Oh the cheerful budding-time!
When thorn-hedges turn to green,
When new leaves of elm and lime
Cleave and shed their winter screen;
Tender lambs are born and baa,
North wind finds no snow to bring
Vigorous nature laughs 'Ha ha!'
In the miracle of Spring."

and in *Summer:*

"Winter is cold-hearted,
Spring is yea and nay,
Autumn is a weather-cock
Blown every way."

or in *To-day and To-Morrow:*

"All the world is out in leaf
Half the world in flower
Earth has waited weeks and weeks
For this special hour;
Faint the rainbow comes and goes
On a sunny shower."

it is her melodious expression rather than her power of observation that we admire.

Christina's great love for her mother which is so important a feature in her letters, is also revealed in her work. In *Valentines to my Mother* she writes of her:

"Blessed Dear and Heart's Delight,
Companion, Friend and Mother mine."

and: "My blessed Mother in her chair
On Christmas Day seemed an embodied Love."

Her affection for her brothers finds expression in *Portraits* where she draws a likeness of Gabriel:

"An easy, lazy length of limb,
Dark eyes and features from the South,
A short-legged meditative pipe
Set in a supercilious mouth;
Ink and a pen and papers laid
Down on a table for the night
Beside a semi-dozing man
Who wakes to go to bed by light.
A pair of brothers brotherly,
Unlike and yet how much the same," etc.

Her love of 'the South', of Italy, appears in *En Route* which was written on the occasion of her short visit to Italy in 1865, and in which she complains:

"Wherefore art thou strange and not my mother?
Thou hast stolen my heart and broken it;
Would that I might call thy sons 'My brothers'
Call thy daughters 'Sister sweet."

In her *Italia io ti saluto,* which will be quoted later, we find an expression of this same regret at having to live in the cold north, far from Italy.

As has been said in a preceding chapter Christina did not show much interest in political or social affairs. Yet in 1870—'71 during the French—German campaign she gave utterance to her feelings of sympathy for the invaded country in: *The Brother's Blood Crieth,* and *To-day for Me;* also on a social question, that of the rights of women, she expresses her views. Concerning the place that, in her opinion, belongs to woman in her relations with man we read in: *A Helpmeet for Him* that "meek compliances veil her might" and, "him she stays by whom she is stayed." She was evidently a very womanly woman. In one of his letters Gabriel Rossetti speaks of 'the falsetto muscularity of the Barret

Browning style' of which he fancies he sees a trace in his sister's poetry. It does not seem to me that there is much of Mrs. Browning's influence noticeable in Christina Rossetti's poetry.

If one compares the *Monna Innominata* Sonnets with the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* little likeness is to be found in feeling and in form, only so much as there is between all sonnets. There is in Christina Rossetti's sequence of sonnets nothing of the great passion and of the self-abasement caused by that passion that we find in the *Sonnets from the Portuguese;* there is not the same giving up of individuality, the losing of the self in the lover, the feeling of being transfigured and glorified by the princely gift of his love. Mrs. Browning's ninth sonnet may be quoted to illustrate this self-abasement:

"Can it be right to give what I can give?
To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears
As salt as mine, and hear the sighing years
Re-sighing on my lips renunciative
Through those infrequent smiles, which fail to live
For all thy adjurations? O my fears,
That this can scarce be right! We are not peers
So to be lovers; and I own and grieve
That givers of such gifts as mine are, must

Be counted with the ungenerous. Out, alas!
I will not spoil thy purple with my dust,
Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-glass
Nor give thee any love .... which were unjust,
Beloved, I only love thee! let it pass."

Christina would not have expressed her feelings in this way, she could not have let herself go so much; nor would she have been capable of the error of taste in the second and third lines which illustrate the saying that there is but one step between pathos and ridicule. Christina's natural reserve would have prevented her from writing as Mrs. Browning did in the twelfth sonnet:

"Indeed this very love which is my boast
And which, when rising up from breast to brow
Doth crown me with a ruby large enow
To draw men's eyes, and prove the inner cost" ....

nor as in the eighteenth sonnet,

I never gave a lock of hair away
To a man, Dearest, except this to thee,
Which now upon my fingers thoughtfully
I ring out to the full brown length, and say:
"Take it."

or in the closing lines of no. XVII

> "How dearest, wilt thou have me for most use?
> A hope, to sing by gladly? . . . . or a fine
> Sad memory, with thy songs to interfuse? . . . .
> A shade, in which to sing . . . . of palm or pine?
> A grave, on which to rest from singing? . . . . Choose."

Also in an other respect the difference between the two poets is illustrated by the sonnets. The *Sonnets from the Portuguese* contain many references to classical literature; for instance the opening lines of the series run:

> "I thought once how Theocritus had sung
> Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years
> Who each one in a gracious hand appears
> To bear a gift for mortals, old or young."

and the fifth sonnet begins:

> "I lift my heavy heart up solemnly
> As once Electra her sepulchral urn."

Christina was not well read in the classics; her tastes went another way, hence we do not find any classical references in her sonnets; it is significant that in *her* work there are allusions to the Bible, as in the sixth

and the eighth sonnets. It may be interesting to quote the former, the more so as it is a clear illustration of the difference between the two poets in their attitude towards love.

"Trust me, I have not earned your dear rebuke,
I love, as you would have me, God the most;
Would lose not Him, but you, must one be lost,
Nor with Lot's wife cast back a faithless look,
Unready to forego what I forsook;
This say I, having counted up the cost,
This, though I be the feeblest of God's host,
The sorriest sheep Christ shepherds with His crook.
Yet while I love my God the most, I deem
That I can never love you overmuch;
I love Him more, so let me love you too;
Yea, as I apprehend it, love is such
I cannot love you if I love not Him,
I cannot love Him if I love not you."

There is also self-abasement here, but before God, not before a human being. The intensity of passion that is expressed in the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* is not to be found in the *Monna Innominata* sonnets.

As another example of the more reserved tone and

the greater dignity of expression of the Innominata sonnets, the fourth of the series may be quoted:

"I loved you first: but afterwards your love,
Outsoaring mine, sang such a loftier song
As drowned the friendly cooings of my dove.
Which owes the other most? My love was long
And yours one moment seemed to wax more strong;
I loved and guessed at you, you construed me
And loved me for what might or might not be —
Nay, weights and measures do us both a wrong.
For verily love knows not 'mine' or 'thine';
With separate 'I' and 'thou' free love has done,
For one is both and both are one in love;
Rich love knows nought of 'thine that is not mine';
Both have the strength and both the length thereof,
Both of us, of the love which makes us one."

From what precedes it is evident that as regards the spiritual and mental background of their poetry the difference between the two women poets is very great. Christina as has been mentioned above, had none of Mrs. Browning's taste for and knowledge of the classics, nor had she her philosophy, her wide outlook on life, her knowledge of literature and of social and human affairs. Christina's range was too limited for her to produce works

like: *Prometheus Bound, The Rhyme of the Duchess May, The Lay of the Brown Rosary* (which two latter poems have some affinities with Gabriel's ballads), *The Cry of the Children, A Man's Requirement's, To George Sand, Cowper's Grave, On a Portrait of Wordsworth* or *Stanzas on Lord Byron.*

A poem of general philosophic thought as: *Insufficiency,* the subject of which is the impossibility for a human being to find perfect expression for his ideas, would be beyond Christina Rossetti's scope.

Mr. Mackenzie Bell draws attention to the very characteristic fact that though Christina, being half Italian, must have felt deeply for the cause of the liberation of Italy, it was not she, but Mrs. Browning, who expressed such feelings in the stirring poems: *First News from Villafranca, A Tale of Villafranca* and *Parted Lovers.* The writer adds that in Christina's: *Italia io ti saluto* there is pathos also, but it is the personal, not the national note that is struck in this exquisite poem:

Italia io ti Saluto.

To come back from the sweet south, to the North
Where I was born, bred, look to die;
Come back to do my day's work in its day,
Play out my play —
Amen, amen, say I.

To see no more the country half my own,
Nor hear the half familiar speech,
Amen, I say; I turn to that bleak North
Whence I came forth —
The south lies out of reach.

But when our swallows fly back to the south
To the sweet south, to the sweet south,
The tears may come again into my eyes
On the old wise
And the sweet name to my mouth.

But though Christina Rossetti was much more limited in her range and was not by any means so intellectual as Mrs. Browning, she had to a far greater extent the poet's most pleasing gift of melodiousness. Nor was she so apt to err, as Mrs. Browning was, in choosing unpoetic subjects for her poetry.

Two influences may still be mentioned as being here and there noticeable in Christina's poetry, viz: that of Shelley, which we find, for instance, in the lyric *March* of *The Pageant*, and that of Tennyson, of whose style we are reminded in *Repining*, *The Prince's Progress* and *The Lowest Room*. On the whole very little influence of other poets is noticeable. When reading Christina

Rossetti's writings one is conscious of being in the company of a personality, of a woman who dared to be herself. She had her own views of things, and though the range of her interests was not great, though she did not attempt to approach difficult political, economical or philosophical questions, yet one feels that she is worth listening to, because of the great truthfulness and sincerity with which she expresses her thoughts on the things that fall within her scope. She was very subjective: the poet's varying moods find utterance in her work. She is often sad, at times hopeful, occasionally serenely happy. She sings of her great Love of God, of her Mother, of her brothers and sister; also of her weariness of a life that does not satisfy her.

Her greatest gift was her wonderful command of her instrument, the English language. The meaning is never obscured by the form. That she practised a great deal before she attained this mastery is proved by the large number of bouts rimé's she wrote, some of which are published in her collected works. Yet, when reading her poetry, one never for a moment thinks of the cleverness of the poet, as one cannot help doing, for instance, when reading Swinburne. The current of her song flows so smoothly that the art is forgotten.

The form the poet chooses is always very appropriate

to her subject. In *Goblin Market* short lines are used which, by their hopping motion indicate the movements of the goblins; the lines grow longer when the story of the two sisters is told.

In *Maiden Song* the cheerful opening lines at once strike the bright note that characterises the poem:

"Long ago and long ago
And long ago still,
There dwelt three merry maidens
Upon a distant hill.
One was tall Meggan,
And one was dainty May
But one was fair Margaret
More fair than I can say,
Long ago and long ago."

There is great variety in the measures she uses. As a rule she writes in stanzas, but occasionally, as in *Repining*, in rhyming couplets. In *The Lowest Room* the stanzas are four-lined with only one rhyme in the second and fourth lines; the four-lined stanzas of *From House to Home* rhyme a b a b. In *The Prince's Progress* we find six-lined stanzas rhyming a a a b a b. In the sonnets and in her other shorter poems also much variety is to be noticed as regards length of stanzas and of lines,

number of accents and distribution of rhyme. In the *Monna Innominata* series the scheme of the first sonnet is:

a b b a a c c a d c e f d f;

of the second:

a b b a a b b a c d d c c d

of the third:

a b b a a b b a b c d c d b

of the fourth:

a b a b b c c b d b a d a b.

A characteristic of all Christina Rossetti's poetry is simplicity of language and the use of genuine English words. To illustrate this a few examples may be quoted from the various kinds of her poetry, from the work of her youth, from her devotional and from the general poems. The first quotation is from *Repining*, written in 1847, so when the poet was still very young:

"She sat alway through the long day,
Spinning the weary thread away:
And ever said in an undertone,
'Come, that I be no more alone.'
From early dawn to set of sun
Working, her task was still undone;

She heard the gentle turtle-dove
Tell to its mate a tale of love;
She saw the glancing swallows fly,
Ever a social company."

The following bears the title *Two Pursuits* and belongs to the *Devotional Poems:*

"A voice said: 'Follow, follow; and I rose
And followed far into the dreamy night,
Turning my back upon the pleasant light.
It led me where the bluest water flows,
And would not let me drink: where the corn grows
I dared not pause, but went uncheered by sight
Or touch; until at length in evil plight,
It left me wearied out with many woes.
Some time I sat as one bereft of sense;
But soon another voice from very far
Called, 'Follow, follow'; and I rose again,
Now on my night has dawned a blessed star;
Kind steady hands my sinking steps sustain,
And will not leave me till I shall go hence."

From the general poems it is a pleasure to quote the beautiful *The Summer is Ended.*

"Wreathe no more lilies in my hair,
For I am dying, Sister sweet:
Or, if you will for the last time
Indeed, why make me fair
Once for my winding-sheet.

Pluck no more roses for my breast,
For I like them fade in my prime:
Or, if you will, why pluck them still,
That they may share my rest
Once more for the last time.

Weep not for me when I am gone,
Dear tender one, but hope and smile:
Or, if you cannot choose but weep,
A little while weep on,
Only a little while."

VII.

CONTEMPORARY OPINION AND CRITICISM.

Christina Rossetti was so fortunate as to find favour in the eyes of contemporary critics so that the reviews written on the publication of the several volumes of her poetry were full of praise. It is striking that those who write about her work nearly all include the poet's character in their praises. Among the literary men of her own time who admired her was A. C. Swinburne. In his *Ballad of Appeal* he expressed his admiration in this way:

'Blithe verse made all the dim sense clear
That smiles of babbling babes conceal;
Prayer's perfect heart spake here: and here
Prose notes of blameless woe and weal
More soft than this poor song's appeal.
Where orchards bask, where cornfields wave,
They dropped like rains that cleanse and lave,
And scattered all the year along,
Like dewfall on an April grave,
Sweet water from the well of song.'

In a letter dated 26 July 1882 Christina, speaking of Swinburne, writes to her brother William: "He has kindly presented me with his volume" (Tristram of Lyonesse), "a valued gift; and I cannot forbear lending you the letter which accompanied the book. This is the fourth book he has sent me and I not one hitherto to him, so for lack of aught else I am actually offering him a *Called to be Saints*, merely however drawing his attention to the verses."

On 28 July she writes: "Mr. Swinburne has acknowledged with consummate graciousness *Called to be Saints* and gives me great pleasure by liking the verses for St. Barnabas, Holy Innocents S. S. Philip and James. I do not think he is at all offended by my offering him the book."

In 1883 Swinburne, in token of his admiration, dedicated to Christina Rossetti his: *A Century of Roundels*.

In his Preface to A. C. Pollard's edition of Herrick, Swinburne, after discussing the question whether Herrick ought to be considered a sacred poet or not, writes as follows:

"But neither Herbert nor Crashaw could have bettered such a divinely beautiful triplet as this:

"We see Him come, and know Him ours
Who with His sunshine and His showers
Turns all the patient ground to flowers."

That is worthy of Miss Rossetti herself: and praise of such work can go no higher."

Gabriel Rossetti, in a letter to Hall Caine, wrote:

"Mr. Swinburne who is a vast admirer of my sister's, thinks the *Advent* perhaps the noblest of all her poems, and also specially loves the *Passing Away*." And he goes on, giving his own opinion: "I do not know that I quite agree with your decided preference for the two sonnets of hers your signalise, — the *World* is very fine, but the other *Dead before Death*, a little sensational *for her*. I think *After Death* one of her noblest, and the one *After Communion*. In my own view the greatest of all her poems is that on France after the siege," *To-day for Me*. A very splendid piece of feminine ascetic passion is *The Convent Threshold*.

William M. Rossetti also speaks of his sister in connection with Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads*. In *A Criticism* he writes:

"The last of our present poetic quartett, Christina Rossetti, is a singer of a different order from all these, reaching true artistic effects with apparently little study and as little of mere chance, rather by an internal sense of fitness, a mental touch as delicate as the fingertips of the blind. She simply, as it were, pours words into the mould of her idea; and the resultant effigy comes right,

because the idea, and the mind of which it is a phase, are beautiful ones, serious, yet feminine and in part almost playful. There is no poet with a more marked instinct for fusing the thought into the image, and the image into the thought; the fact is always to her emotional, not merely positive, and the emotion clothed in a sensible shape, not merely abstract. No treatment can be more artistically womanly in general scope than this which appears to us the most essential distinction of Miss Rossetti's writings."

A little further the writer says that: "the prevalent cadence of Swinburne's *Rococo* and *Madonna Mia* and also of *The Garden of Proserpine* show some likeness with some of Christina's productions."

On Christina Rossetti's death Swinburne wrote his *Elegy*, beginning:

"A Soul more sweet than the morning of new-born May
Has passed with the year that has passed from the world
away."

Christina's volume: *Goblin Market and other Poems* was well received. The *British Quarterly* of July 1862 wrote: "All these (poems) are marked by beauty and tenderness. They are frequently quaint and sometimes a little capricious."

Goblin Market is, in the same article, said to be "the poem which is most purely and completely a work of art"; but: "the devotional pieces are those we have liked best."

The *National Review* said of the volume: "The principal poem has rare delicacy and beauty of a modest kind and several of the sonnets are fine." On 30 November 1875 the poet writes to her brother Gabriel: "I have had one favourable review of my new edition in the *Glasgow News*" (the reference is to *Sing Song*). She writes on 17 December 1879: *Seek and Find* has been favourably mentioned in the *Saturday Review*, and on 5 Sept. 1881: "I am much pleased with his (Hall Caine's) Academy article (on the *Pageant and other Poems*). I cannot forbear adding how delighted I am at the favourable verdict on the *Pageant* which is, I fancy, among the best and most wholesome things I have produced." Concerning this work, which was published in 1881, the *British Quarterly* wrote: "*The Pageant* is full of grace and fancifulness; there is playful freshness in it; it abounds in delicate pictures which claim for themselves a place apart in the imagination." The *Guardian* said in a review of the same volume: "She (the poet) breathes habitually the atmosphere of wonder and aspiration. But she is also a student of high

literary models and can express herself, on an occasion, with the clearness, directness and precision which are the usual indications of a thoroughly trained mind." The *Daily News* wrote: "A more finished grace, however, is traceable in some of these pieces than she has hitherto attained; they are characterised by grave tenderness." And the verdict of the *Westminster Review* was: "Very good work in Miss Rossetti's new volume of poems."

Mr. W. Sharp was among the admirers of her work, as we hear from a letter written by Christina to her brother William on 7 Dec. 1882, in which we read: "I have had a narrow escape of seeing my birthday memorialised in the *Atheneum* by a sonnet from Mr. Sharp. He tells me he can explain the reason of its non-appearance; but in my secret soul," she adds jocularly, "I suspect that reason of being the cogent one that it is not a good sonnet." On 9 Nov. 1892 the poet sent to her brother William a review from *The Rock* on her *Face of the Deep* which, she says, "is a pleasing one, laudatory to a high degree." In a letter written on 8 February 1893 she writes to the same brother, concerning the edition of the *Collected Verse:* It sold beyond what was anticipated so that a second edition was not out quite in time to meet the demand.

On p. p. 115—116 of Mr. Mackenzie Bell's biography we read: "When reviewing in The *Atheneum* of February 15, 1896 Christina Rossetti's *New Poems*, Mr. Watts Dunton has some touching remarks respecting her mother's influence on Christina and Christina's own influence on Dante Gabriel: "Christina Rossetti's peculiar form of the Christian sentiment she inherited from her mother, the sweetness of whose nature was never disturbed by that exercise of the egoism of the artist in which Christina indulged, and without whose influence it is difficult to imagine what the Rossetti family would have been .... All that is noblest in Christina's poetry, an ever-present sense of the beauty and power of goodness, must surely have come from the mother."

In the same article Mr. Watts Dunton says that Christina's youthfulness of temperament, which had such a great charm for her brother Gabriel, must have come to her from her mother and that the beauty of Christina's life and her religious system had an extraordinary influence on her brother. The writer thinks in Christina's poetry it becomes evident what Christianity may be as the motive power of poetry. We quote from this article: "Mr. W. M. Rossetti speaks of "the very wide and exceedingly strong outburst of eulogy" of his sister

which appeared in the public press after her death. Yet that outburst was far from giving adequate expression to what was felt by some of her readers — those between whom and herself there was a bond of sympathy so sacred and so deep as to be something like religion." — And: "They feel that at every page of her writing the beautiful poetry is only the outcome of a life whose almost unexampled beauty fascinates them. Although Christina Rossetti had more of what is called the unconsciousness of poetic inspiration than any other poet of her time, the writing of poetry was not by any means the chief business of her life. No one felt so deeply as she that poetic art is only at best the imperfect body in which dwelt the poetic soul."

Mr. William Sharp in his *Reminiscences of Christina Rossetti* mentions the discrimination the poet showed in her admiration of the masterpieces of English poetry. He also remembers the beautiful and melodious way in which she repeated poetry. Her reading was not extensive, but she was a good critic of literature.

Mr. Arthur Symons in his: *The Poets and the Poetry of the Century* says of her style:

"The secret of a style which seems innocently unaware of its own beauty is, no doubt, its sincerity, leading to the employment of homely words where homely words

are wanted, and always of natural and really expressive words; yet not sincerity only, but sincerity as the servant of a finely touched and exceptionally seeing nature. A power of seeing finely beyond the scope of ordinary vision; that, in a few words, is the note of Miss Rossetti's genius, and it brings with it a subtle and as if instinctive power of expressing subtle and yet as if instinctive conceptions; always clearly, always simply, with a singular and often startling homeliness, yet in a way and about subjects as far removed from the borders of the commonplace as possible. This power is shown in every division of her poetry; in the peculiar witchery of the poems dealing with the supernatural, in the exaltations of the devotional poems, in the particular charm of the child-songs, in the special variety and excellence of the poems of affection and meditation. The union of homely yet always select literalness of treatment with mystical visionariness constitutes the peculiar quality of her poetry."

Mr. Arthur C. Benson wrote an appreciative article on Christina Rossetti in *The National Review* of February 1895 and Mrs. Meynell in *The New Review* of the same month and year points out that Christina Rossetti is always poetical. Soon after the poet's death Katherine Tynan (Mrs. Hinkson) contributed an essay on her life and

writings to the *Bookman*. She remarks that Christina was fond of the very book one felt sure she must have been fond of, namely Mrs. Gaskell's *Cranford*.

Mr. Mackenzie Bell mentions (p. 167) that in 1893 or 1894 Henri Jacottet wrote some good articles about Christina in a Swiss Review.

In *The Dictionary of National Biography* Dr. Prichard Garnett observes:

"Her *Goblin Market* is original in conception, style and structure, as imaginative as the 'Ancient Mariner' and comparable only to Shakespeare for the insight shown into unhuman and yet spiritual natures."

And Mr. Lionel Johnson, in 'the Academy' of 25 July 1896 says that, in his opinion, her characteristic greatness lies in her most intimate, most severe, most passionate and sacred poems; in the work which sets her in the company of Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, Father Southwell, Herrick and Cardinal Newman. "By this", says Mr. Lionel Johnson, "is not meant that her obviously and ostensibly sacred poems are alone her greatest; many others, poems of meditation or of passion with no distinct Christian cry in them, stand side by side with the poems divine and devout. Her more external work, with its gaieties and beautiful imaginings is full of delights."

Among her admirers who did not write essays or biographies or criticisms on her was Mr. W. Gladstone who pronounced her sonnets to be perfect of form and finish and who, on one occasion, recited her *Maiden Song*. An admirer of long standing was her maternal grandfather, Mr. Polidori, who is reported to have said of her, when she was twelve, that she was going to be "the cleverest of the set."

Some of her poems were considered fit to be set to music, e. g. *Songs in a Cornfield*, *Passing Away* and *Goblin Market* (to the latter Mr. E. Aguilar wrote an accompaniment). When Christina Rossetti died her loss was mourned and her gifts were praised by many. The bishop of Durham wrote a letter to William M. Rossetti on the occasion of Christina's death, which expresses feelings of the deepest regret. "Not a week passes, he wrote, when I do not find some fresh pleasure from fragments of your sister's work. And my experience is, I am sure, that of very many. Those who so teach us and reveal themselves to us cannot be lost."

CONCLUSION.

Christina Rossetti was a noble, warm-hearted woman who took life seriously and who, through self-denial and devotion to those dear to her, tried to live like a true Christian. She was a personality; she tried, independently of others, to find salvation in her own way.

She took a certain interest in social and political questions of the day and, when asked, expressed a decided opinion or them, but she did not come forward to assert these views. Christina Rossetti was of a reserved, retiring nature, happy to live in the seclusion of her home. She was greatly loved and respected by those who knew her well; to her brother Gabriel she represented the ideal of womanhood and her brother William wrote about her with great love and appreciation.

Her life was in keeping with the fine thoughs expressed in her verse; she practised what she preached. Her devotional prose and poetry were of great moral support to those for whom it was written.

Knowing her own limitations she never attempted to write about things she did not understand.

As regards form her verse has not been surpassed in melodiousness by any poet England has produced. She takes a foremost place in English literature. She is the greatest religious poet of the nineteenth century in England and among the poetesses only Mrs. Browning can be considered to compete with her in excellence.

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Dow J.T. De Wilde

DATE	NAME OF BORROWER
Jan 5 /59	Virginia Denton